

Reconciliation (Part One)

Making Amends With a Brother

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The American political scene has always been divisive, but this election cycle has revealed how divided the nation really is. The two political parties, Democrats and Republicans, have never been more at odds. The people who follow (and the people who do not follow) those parties have actually shown that they really do not like one another. Those two parties—the Republicans and the Democrats—have, in this cycle, decided to give us the two worst candidates that they could possibly come up with. But all that aside, we should not really think that the acrimony of this year’s campaign is the worst that this country has ever seen. That is not true.

In fact, some historians would put the election of 1800 (that goes almost all the way back to the founding) as the worst mudslinging campaign in US history. What is so significant about that is that the two candidates for office in that year were two founders of this nation. The incumbent president was John Adams and his opponent was Vice President Thomas Jefferson. So it makes the political mudslinging that occurred in that year even more difficult to swallow.

I should be very quick to point out that the mudslinging that happened during that election was done mostly by partisan supporters of the candidates, not the candidates themselves. But what was going on at that time is very similar to what is going on today, although it has been flipped.

At that time this was a clash between the strong central government (Federalists) and the small-government, libertarian states’ rights (Republicans). Now you will say “Okay, the Republicans now are like that.” But, no, this was not the Republicans. They called themselves ‘Republicans’ but they are actually the precursors of the Democrats. So, in about 216 years’ time, everything has turned all the way over. Now the Democrats are the big-

government (strong central government) types and the Republicans (the ‘Conservatives,’ which the Federalists would have been at that time) are the small-government people.

Now, the two men once had been great friends and had spent a lot of personal time with one another, not just in America but overseas, because they were both posted as ambassadors of the new nation to Europe. It was John Adams to the Netherlands (and England at certain times) and Jefferson to France. So, they got together often there. They travelled together. Jefferson sent his daughter up to Braintree, Massachusetts to stay with the Adams’ for a while. They got together whenever they could.

Of course, they were two of the ones most responsible for one of the greatest documents that have ever come out of the pen of a man: the Declaration of Independence. As a matter of fact, Jefferson wrote the bulk of it and presented it to the rest of the committee and John Adams made himself a committee of one to fight for every clause in what Jefferson had written.

They freely acknowledged their mutual fondness for each other. In 1784, Adams wrote that Jefferson was “an old friend with whom I have often had occasion to labor at many a knotty problem, and in whose ability and steadiness I always found great cause to confide.”

Jefferson, for his part, similarly praised Adams to his friend James Madison. “Adams is profound in his views,” he said, “and accurate in his judgments. He is so amiable that I pronounce you will love him if you ever become acquainted with him.”

All this mutual love and affection had occurred before the 1790s. By the 1790s, though, Adams later wrote he judged Jefferson to be “weak, confused, uninformed, and ignorant” and at the same time Jefferson called Adams’ actions as president “the most grotesque scene in the tragic comedy of government.” These two men turned very quickly, in only a matter of about 10 years, from being close friends to being bitter enemies. Now it was not really personal animosity—anything one had done to the other—but it was politics that separated them. A very deep ideological divide. Neither of them was solely responsible.

If we were actually to point a finger of blame at someone who is probably the most responsible for all of this, it would have to be at (drumroll) today's wonderful founder—who everybody thinks is the greatest since sliced bread—Alexander Hamilton.

He was the head of the extreme wing of the Federalist Party, and he had a bunch of sycophants whom he worked all the angles to get into John Adams' cabinet. Therefore, he and his buddies influenced Adams to push several policies that favored big government (central government, strong government) over the states: Things like a national bank; closer ties with the British, who at that time were our enemies; a much, much stronger central government even to the point of a standing army; and all kinds of other things that came out later (I will mention maybe one or two of them). But, to many, these policies that were being pushed by Adams went against the central principles of the Constitution, and definitely the Declaration of Independence.

Thomas Jefferson was not free from controversy himself. He was stoutly pro-French, so much so that he was very much in favor of the French Revolution and all that was going on over there. He found himself publicly arguing against Adams' initiatives, calling them "political heresies." During the election of 1796, Jefferson decided to take a firm hand in the politics of his party, and he became the head of the opposition. Not long after this, his supporters in the Republican Party began to call Adams things like 'a monarchist,' 'the Duke of Braintree,' and—the one I liked best—'his rotundancy' (because he had put on a bit of weight).

In 1798, Congress drafted the Alien and Sedition Acts. This was really the final straw between Adams and Jefferson because the Alien and Sedition Acts, which were pushed by the Federalists, sought to eliminate Republican dissension within the country and it actually permitted the federal government to jail or issue fines to any person who sought to make false, scandalous, and malicious comments about the federal government or its officers. Totally against the First Amendment. So, this only strengthened Jefferson's antagonism toward the Federalists, and specifically towards Adams who he felt should have been responsible to rein Hamilton in.

Meanwhile, the Federalists, for their part, characterized Jefferson as a coward; a weak, wavering, indecisive character; a philosopher, not a statesman. They also began the infamous whisper campaign saying that Jefferson had fathered children by one of his slaves, Sally Hemmings, which nobody knew was actually true—or at least it was not publicly really known until recently when DNA was able to confirm that the whisper campaign was actually correct.

By this point there was no way to save their friendship. It had not come to blows but it was probably close to it. And, frankly, because of what had happened, neither man had much desire to make any kind of reconciliation. Jefferson came out on top in the election of 1800 and Adams returned to Massachusetts to nurse his grievances for years. But once the political atmosphere that consumed them in these times changed—began to turn over with the end of the war of 1812—the two men began to renew their friendship.

In 1809, a mutual signer of the declaration (you may have heard of him before), Dr. Benjamin Rush, had a dream. Now historians are not sure whether he actually had this dream or whether he just used a dream in order to try to draw them back together. But he said he dreamed about the two former presidents, and he sent an account to both men. He said that in the dream he saw the alienated statesmen renew their friendship and begin corresponding with one another, writing letters back and forth (because, of course, Adams was up in Boston area and Jefferson was in Northern Virginia). So they had to write letters. And they were old men at this time (Adams was 79 or something like that and Jefferson was about 70).

Adams and Jefferson received this letter from Benjamin Rush and both politely acknowledged it back to Rush, but they thought no more about it. But Rush would have none of it. After about three years, at Rush's urging, Jefferson (whom he thought was maybe a little bit more willing to start the letter writing) sent a very tentative letter back to Boston, to Adams, and he responded with a very guarded reply. It was like they were feeling each other out to see if they were both serious. But one letter followed another until Adams wrote to Jefferson on July 15, 1813 (this was after about 18 months). He wrote:

Never mind it, my dear Sir, if I write four letters to your one. Your one is worth more than my four. You and I ought not to die before we have explained ourselves to one another.

In the fourteen years between 1812 and their deaths, Adams wrote to Jefferson 109 letters and Jefferson penned 49 in return (it was more like 2 to 1 rather than 4 to 1). So bitter enemies, prodded by a friend's dream, were reconciled for the final years of their lives and they were able to die satisfied that they were friends again.

I do not know if you are aware (probably you are)—this is one of the big little facts of US history—John Adams (the second president) and Thomas Jefferson (the third president), authors of the Declaration of Independence, died on the same day, only three hours apart. And you know, it was July 4, 1826. And you know what? It was the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

What were Adams' last words? As he lay dying, late in the afternoon or early evening, on July 4, 1826, he said (or I believe it was a niece who was in the room who said), "Thomas Jefferson survives!" He said no more and died. But Thomas Jefferson had died about three or four hours before, which he did not know. But he had such confidence that the country would move on because Thomas Jefferson was still around, which is very touching. The two of them had gone from being great friends to bitter enemies and back to being great friends again.

I think a lot of Americans take a great deal of satisfaction and contentment from that—that even bitter political rivals could be friends and make this country great. So, if such bitter political enemies can reconcile despite being offended by the other and their partisans' multiple times, I think it gives great hope to the rest of us that we can do the same.

But as you see from the story of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, reconciliation is not easy. Nor does reconciliation happen overnight. Not normally. Normally it takes a while because the feelings that happen when people are offended and are estranged, are sharp and they are very difficult

to get over. What it takes is great strength of character and humility, along with a willingness to sacrifice oneself, sometimes very deeply, to bring people back into a loving relationship.

Today we are going to take some time to look at a few biblical examples of reconciliation, so we can glean a few principles which we can put into use in our own lives so that we can reconcile with one another.

Now before going any further, we need to understand what reconciliation is, just so we all start on the same page. We will start with the definitions. Merriam-Webster, or some other type of dictionary, would define ‘reconcile’ as ‘to win over to friendliness’; ‘to cause hostile persons to become amicable.’ Another definition is ‘to compose or settle a quarrel or dispute.’ And, finally, ‘to bring into agreement or harmony’; ‘to make compatible.’ So that is the typical English definition of the word ‘reconcile.’

The Latin original, ‘reconciliare,’ which is very similar, means ‘to make good again,’ or ‘to make friendly again,’ or even ‘to repair.’ So it is very similar to our own English word. We just plucked it right out of Latin and use it pretty much the same.

The Greek word that Jesus uses in Matthew 5:24 is similar in meaning. This word is ‘diallassomai’ and it means ‘to be restored to normal relations or harmony with another.’

Again, all these words basically mean the same thing. And it is very clear that, culturally, everybody on this earth has to have a concept of reconciliation because people tend to offend one another—sin against one another, commit crimes against one another—and so there has to be some sort of way of bringing two parties back together, and that is reconciliation: the process of bringing two people who were once apart, back together; to repair a breach between two parties and settling the quarrel, dispute, offense, or whatever it is that has come between them.

Let us go to that scripture in Matthew 5 that I was just speaking of, where Jesus talks about reconciliation. (I believe Ted was here about a month ago in his sermonette.) We are going to read the whole passage between verses 21 and 26. We could call this part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, not only

His explanation of the spirit of the law in terms of murder, but you could say it is His formal text on reconciliation.

Matthew 5:21-26 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of [Gehenna] hell fire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.”

As I mentioned, we need to note that His statement on reconciliation is in the context of the sixth commandment “You shall not kill” or “You shall do no murder.” The sixth commandment begins with murder or killing another person. We are not necessarily talking about manslaughter here (that is covered elsewhere). But this is the taking of a life *purposely* rather than by accident. However, here it begins with murder but expands out. Because when Jesus applies the spirit of the law, He takes the central focus of murder, which is very narrow, and He expands it out to anger, hatred, contempt even, and slander. That is all those things He is talking about here.

You are angry with your brother? Now we are not talking just about murder; we are talking about ‘angry with your brother.’ He uses ‘without a cause’ here (some translations of the Bible do not have ‘without a cause,’ but I do not want to get into that). But when you get angry with your brother, it is pretty likely that it is going to lead to sin, unless that anger is somehow cooled down and cooler heads prevail. He says if you are angry with your brother, you are in danger of what we would call maybe the village judgment. You go to the elders of the city or town, and they will make a judgment one against the other.

Then He says, “Whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’” which is essentially, if I can put it in kind of a colloquial way, calling your fellow person “a brainless idiot.” You have contempt for them, for their intelligence especially. You are really having a great deal of contempt for the other person and his ability to do anything (“You moron!”), which is actually not right because the other one (“You fool!”) is more of the ‘moron’ one in the Greek. But it says here that if you say that your brother is a stupid idiot, you are in danger of going before the Sanhedrin. That is what the word ‘council’ here underlies, that you could be brought up on charges before the national council. Not just your own city council, but He steps it up and says, “We’re going to the next level of courts here.”

And then He gets to the one where He says, “But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ ...” Now this is the one that I said has to do more with ‘moron.’ The word ‘moron’ has changed a great deal. I believe the Greek word that underlies this ‘You fool’ is ‘moray,’ which is the root of ‘moron,’ but we think of a moron as an imbecile. But that is not what it meant in the Greek and that is why they have translated it ‘You fool!’ But they left out a word. And the word does not apply just to foolishness, but moral foolishness. So, what you are actually saying to a person is using some sort of insult to undercut his moral character, saying that he is an immoral so-and-so. Therefore, what you are doing is actually undermining his reputation and his character. He says this is so bad (in Jesus’ eyes) that the penalty is Gehenna (hellfire).

He is saying here, in an ascending way, that this commandment about murder covers a great deal more territory. You are not just killing another person’s body, but you are killing his reputation; you are killing his character; you are killing the way that people see him, and many other things. You are taking that person and you are diminishing him by a great deal, not only by your actions but your words.

So, what we have just gone over, under murder here, are sins (and crimes, you might say) against another’s person, his very being. You are taking his character and reputation and very being into account and you are judging them to be unworthy.

This is opposed to some of the other commandments which are sins against a person's goods (the eighth commandment: You shall not steal), or against a person's parents (the fifth commandment: Honor your father and your mother). And if we pick out the seventh commandment (You shall not commit adultery), those are sins against one's intimate and covenantal relationships.

In some ways, this commandment against murder, as Jesus expands it out here, is similar to the ninth commandment (believe it or not!)—You shall bear no false witness against your neighbor. The ninth commandment (bearing false witness against a neighbor) specifically forbids speech that undermines true judgment of another person.

When Jesus expands out the commandment on murder, He speaks about speech that undermines a person's character and his person, calling him worthless, an idiot, a fool. So you are actually, in both commandments, striking directly against another person's character in some respects, depending upon which part of the commandment you break. But this is part of the spirit of the law that He is opening up here, that these commandments cover much wider swathes of territory than we would have thought before.

Now, once we get to verses 23 through 26—after His explanation of how murder had expanded—what He is doing here is getting to the point where “Okay, what do you do if this has happened? What do you do if someone has called you, or you have called him (most specifically that is what He is talking about—you have called him a ‘moral fool’ or you have called him an ‘idiot’), or you have been angry with your brother without cause?” What do you do? Do you not want to be right with God and right with man—right with this person? Do you not want to make sure that all your relationships are okay? Do you not want peace?

Well, Jesus, of course, assumes that we do and so He is giving us some instruction about how we can fix things. And, of course, a Jew at that time would want to be right with God and they would do all these ceremonies that are prescribed. So He is talking about the normal Jew who, in that situation, would take his gift—a sacrifice—to the Temple so that he would be covered for his sin. That would be the normal thing that a person would do. “Oh no, I’

ve done this bad thing. I need to go to the Temple and seek God's covering for this through sacrifice." So, he gets there. He has his animal, or his turtledove, or whatever he is taking as a gift to God. And he gets right there to the head of the line where the priest is going to say: "Okay, what are you doing? What shall I pray for? What shall we do here with this sacrifice?" And Jesus says, "If you get to that point and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave it there and go your way, and reconcile with the brother."

What Jesus is saying here about "leave your sacrifice there at the altar" is essentially this: He says if you get to that point and you realize that you have a problem with your brother—that there is a breach between the two of you—your sacrifice is essentially worthless. You might as well just drop it and leave because it is not going to be effective. God is not going to be satisfied because there is a great deal of the job left undone. So, because he has not confessed his sin to his brother and made amends, God would not cover his sin. His sacrifice is worthless. There must be reconciliation first.

Jesus says, "Abandon the sacrifice for the moment and make up with the offended brother." First clear up the problem between separated brethren and then seek God's forgiveness and clearing. The breach between the parties must be healed first. Why is that? Why must the breach be healed, or at least attempted to be healed, where the person who is going to give the sacrifice feels satisfied that he has done his best to make reconciliation with his brother?

The reason is this: If there has been no reconciliation, sin will likely continue between the two of you (whether it is hard feelings, further offenses, harsh words certainly, flare-ups of anger, condemnation one of another, grudges, and perhaps even full-blown hatred) and it could then of course lead even to murder. The Hatfield's and McCoy's feud. It was a silly thing over a pig, was it not? And it ended up taking a couple of lives at least and made the history books as an object lesson for the rest of us. That is what happens when reconciliation is not worked on immediately—when it is allowed to fester.

The principle here is that restoration of our relationship with God will not occur until we restore the human relationship to the best of our ability. The

sacrifice that was left there at the altar is only effective and worthwhile when it tries to rectify the consequences of the sin involved in the breach between two people. So as much sacrifice as you want to do is not going to work unless that sacrifice is focused on restoring the relationship.

Now we get to verses 25 and 26 and He kind of changes gears a little bit. But what He is doing, in changing gears, is giving us its second principle that is very important. The first principle was the most important because it dealt with the relationship with God. But now the second principle that He brings in has to do with the relationship between the two people and making it easier and most efficient to reconcile. This principle is 'Take care of the matter as soon as possible.'

Reconcile as quickly as you can. The sooner the better. In fact, immediately after the offense is the very best thing. If you find that you have offended somebody by something you have said or something you have done, the very best thing is to apologize as soon as possible. Do it before you go to bed, do it right as you are thinking about it because, that way, nothing has begun to burn, nothing has begun to build up. You can get it over with while it is small and they can see that you really did not mean what you did (hopefully, you really did not mean what you did!). All the facts are at hand right away, the situation is fresh on the mind, and hopefully things can be smoothed over quickly.

The illustration that Jesus uses here ("agree with your adversary quickly while you are on the way with him") could be one of two things, but it is generally about two men walking together to court who have a grievance one against another. How often do we think that two men who have a grievance with each other will be walking together anywhere, much less to court? But I guess it happened in antiquity more often than we think.

Now commentators say there are probably two different ways to look at this. You could either look at it from the Greek perspective or you can look at it from the Hebrew perspective. I will give them both to you. But the Greek perspective I think is the more interesting. I will give that first.

In Greek law, you could do something very similar to what we would call a citizen's arrest. So, if somebody did something to you and you thought it was

worthy of punishment, you could go up to that person and grab him by the collar (he had a robe on him at the time, not a tie and all that like I have). What they would do was that they would get their hands into their collar and twist it so that they can hardly breathe. They thought they were being strangled and then you would then just take that man all the way down to wherever they were having their courts. And you could say, then, with this guy in tow, “This man stole such-and-such from me” or “This man cursed me to the gods” or “This man did...” one thing or the other. And the judge would then make summary judgment. He would mediate between these two.

This was often the thing that occurred when somebody caught a pickpocket or something along that line. A guy gets his pocket slit up, drachmas fall on the ground, “Oh, this guy did it!,” grabs him by the collar, and hauls him off to court. So, the best thing for the pickpocket to do would be to give the man his money back, on the way, before they got to the place where public judgment was going to be “Give him the rest of his money pouch and make restitution (however many times he wanted to do it)” so that the guy would say “Alright, don’t do it again!” and let him go.

So, Jesus is saying, for the stupid pickpocket this would be the best way to get out of something far worse the judge in the public court would have given him. Because then the judge would hand him over to the officer and throw him in jail. And who knows if he would even live in jail because jail conditions were so horrendous at the time and he would have to pay to the last penny.

The second one is the Hebrew illustration which is a little bit less interesting. Oftentimes what would happen in a Jewish court or a Hebrew court would be a lot like our courts where you would have a time and a place where it would happen, say “Next Tuesday, at 3 o’clock in the afternoon, you’re supposed to come to the city gates and we’ll have the elders arrayed there and they’ll make judgement on you.” These two men who live in the same city meet each other on the road going to the gate. And it would be best, Jesus says, for those two, while they are walking together to their mutual appointment, to figure out a way to solve it between themselves.

So that one is not colorful, but it is the same sort of thing. “You do not want,” Jesus says, “to get other people involved.” The advice is to settle the

matter between the two of you without getting judges, or ministers, or churches, or anybody else involved. Once a matter proceeds to involve the law and lawyers and judges, it gets real really quick and it gets down and dirty, and who knows what will happen. It is best to avoid the ‘who knows what’ because you really do not know what is going to happen. Judgment is likely to go against the offender and so the offender needs to make sure that they reconcile quickly with the offended brother. If that is the case—if the judgment goes against the offender—he will be forced to pay a very high price. It does not necessarily have to be money; it can be guilt, it can be reputation, or what have you. So best to avoid all of that and just make amends between the brother personally and privately.

What Jesus is saying here, when you put it all together, is that we will be held responsible for the trouble that we bring on ourselves. You are going to pay the piper, so you better work it out so you do not pay as much as might be required. And to do that (to reconcile, to work it out before you get to the judges) may require a great deal of submission. It might require groveling. It might require a lot of restitution in one product or another or whatever it happens to be—whatever will satisfy.

But those are far better things to do than what punishments the judge will mete out (especially the Judge who is on His throne in heaven). We have got to think about that. It is not just the earthly judge; you have to always think about what the heavenly Judge will think about these things.

The sermon is going to take a bit of a change for the remaining duration. Instead of being more theological, it is going to be more illustrative. Because we are going to take a look at the book of Genesis in three specific places. In the book of Genesis, there are at least three major stories of reconciliation. Some of these we have actually gone over fairly recently and hopefully we can kind of breeze through them without a great deal of detail. We need to look at them so that we can get a taste in terms of an illustration for what reconciliation is and how it is achieved. And I think, looking at the illustrations of reconciliation in Genesis, it will give us some fairly good ideas of the principles that are involved.

One of the things we will see in these three instances is that in none of them was reconciliation easy. Do not ever think reconciliation will be easy

because you are talking about usually two people's stiff-necked carnality that wants to get the best of the situation. A lot of times neither one is willing to back down and that is why we have to approach it differently. It is a very difficult thing to heal a breach between two people. So what we will see is that, as I mentioned, it takes hard work, humility (a lot of that), sacrifice, submission, and love—and a bunch of other character traits as well.

So let us go back to one we saw, just a month ago or so, in Genesis 26. This was in my sermon on persistence and this is the reconciliation of Isaac with Abimelech. One thing that I need to point out is that in every case that we are going to look at in the book of Genesis, it was a converted person reconciling with an unconverted person (or persons). So we get the view of how to do it from the converted person's point of view. Sometimes these things will work. They should work when you are trying to reconcile with a converted person. Hopefully they will give in and have the same humility and submission as you. But, in these cases, we will see these unconverted people reacting in a positive way to the converted person's character.

Genesis 26:12-14 Then Isaac sowed in that land [they were in the land of the Philistines, in Gerar], and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him. The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous; for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him.

This is where the problem begins. It is not the fact that God had blessed Isaac so much, that really should not have been a problem. The problem was the Philistines looked at all that Isaac did—and all the bounty, and the produce, and the abundance that he had—and they envied his wealth. And, of course, with wealth comes growing power.

Genesis 26:15-16 Now the Philistines had stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and they had filled them with earth. And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."

So, they did things against Isaac, in their envy, and they stopped the wells, and finally they just flat-out told him to take a hike—to leave the country—

because it was too much for them to bear and they were afraid. So you have envy and fear happening right here. It is causing a breach between Isaac and Abimelech.

What we have here is a situation where Isaac decides not to fight it. He does not want an enemy. He decides that he will just pick up and leave. He is not going to say, “Ho, I’ve got my rights here. I can have this land.” No, he really could not. It was the Philistines’ land. He was not a Philistine.

Obviously, he was an Israelite—or would become an Israelite (he was a Hebrew). He was not a Canaanite. He was a stranger and a foreigner in the land. So even though his wealth could probably buy him some influence and maybe keep him there on the land, he decided ‘No!’ He would just move on.

So, in verses 17 through 22, Isaac’s men dig a series of wells at Gerar and Sitnah. I do not exactly how many wells it was (it might be two or three), but each time the Philistines contest the wells and make a huge stink about them and force Isaac to go further out—to move away. So he does. He does not really make a big deal out of it. He just says, “Okay, fine, you took another well from me. I’ll just go a few miles away and dig another well.” And he did.

Finally, he digs another one at Rehoboth and they do not contest this one for some reason. So everything seems fine. But he does not stay there. He moves then to Beersheba, probably, as I mentioned in my sermon on ‘Persistence,’ that the trade was probably better there at Beersheba rather than Rehoboth, which is probably the reason why the Philistines did not contest it because it was not a very good place to be for what he needed to do. So, he goes then to Beersheba.

In verses 23 through 25, God appears to him and tells him “Everything is good, Isaac. I am going to bless you.” Because He had been watching this thing play out, over however many weeks and months that had taken, and Isaac had done everything right. He had been a good guest on the land. He had not contested with them. He had not fought them. He had simply moved on whenever they had a grievance against him, even though it really was not justified. They were just trying to be mean to him because of their envy and fear. So God promises him that He is going to bless him for his attitude.

Now let us read verses 26 through 32.

Genesis 26:26 Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath, one of his friends, and Phichol the commander of his army.

Having these friends with him was rather a power move on Abimelech's part: the commander of the army—the General—and Ahuzzath, one of his friends (a king's friend is usually someone with a fair amount of power). So they are coming to him in force.

Genesis 26:27 And Isaac said to them, “Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?”

Clearly, seeing these three men and their power, he is thinking that they are going to continue to offend him, that they are going to do something to push him off the land again.

Genesis 26:28-29 But they said, “We have certainly seen that the Lord is with you. So we said, ‘Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace. . .

I do not know how they came up with that, but they were making themselves look really good on this (“We haven't done a thing and you just keep moving farther away”). But they say here at the end of verse 29:

Genesis 25:29 . . . You are now the blessed of the Lord.

See, that is what they had seen. They had seen that he had been acting against human nature. He had not got all his servants together and fought against them or done anything to cause them offense at all. He had done what is right and good and still he was coming out on top. Their only explanation for that, which was a right and good one, was that God had blessed him. They recognized that truth. So what did he do?

Genesis 25:30 So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank.

He does not even contest the fact that they are lying through their teeth about their not having done anything to him. He just lets it be.

Genesis 25:31-32 Then they arose early in the morning and swore an oath with one another; and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace. It came to pass the same day that Isaac's servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water."

So immediately the blessings from God started pouring in. So his actions, though they were construed to be offensive due to their envy and fear, finally they ended up seeing as his blessedness from God, that he was a man of character, that he did not want to fight them. So, instead of fighting, he had simply backed away, moved away, so as not to cause any further offense to them.

And we see no indication in the scripture here that he complained about anything. His long-term attitude and his non-aggression impressed his adversaries and they made peace with him. He did not have to make peace with them. They, of their own volition, came to him to make a covenant.

What we see here is his sacrifice of the wells, his humility before them, his gentleness with them, and his patience (perhaps, most of all, his patience to remain in peace with the Philistines who were the true aggressors) were what ultimately caused the reconciliation to occur. It took time but God ended up rewarding him with blessings, a peace treaty, and another well of water (the Great Well at Beersheba).

So, in this case, we see Isaac becoming reconciled by persevering and doing good. If you remember, I used this as an example of persistence. Put it another way, he persevered in doing good—in doing what God wanted him to do—and he reaped the blessings from that. He just maintained his integrity. He maintained what God wanted him to do. He did not push back. He just simply gave in, gave in, gave in, did not cause a problem. Finally, his enemies figured out that he was a good guy.

This kind of gives you an idea of what must be done to achieve reconciliation with those that are not inclined to reconcile. They did not want to reconcile with him at first—they just wanted him out of there. They just did not want to see all his wealth and all his blessings right away. But he persisted and they ultimately reconciled with him. So this is how sometimes it must be done. That we just have to put on our patience as much as we can and just keep being patient, keep being patient, and keep being patient—until our patience breaks the other party. God allows reconciliation to occur.

Enough about Isaac. Let us go to Jacob. Let us go to Genesis 32.

Now this is when Jacob is returning to Canaan with his family and all his possessions that he had gotten over those long years that he had been with Laban. And remember that by this time, he has not seen Esau for 20 years, and the last time he saw Esau, the man was trying to kill him—he was trying to find him so he could slit his throat! So he was sure, that upon learning that Jacob was back in the land, that Esau would take up his knife again and come after him, that he would want to kill him to get the headship back of the clan. Jacob is now a converted man after all those years. He wanted to reconcile with his brother. He wanted to make amends.

Now he could not give back the birthright and the blessing, but he would do whatever he could to make amends for that, to give some sort of restoration of what Esau lost. Because it was not just that Esau lost it, it was that Jacob stole it, and he felt that he needed to restore to him something. You will see this in the story.

We have got to remember that when Jacob had left his parents to go to Padan Aram where Laban was, he was a cunning, devious, larcenous trickster. He was all out for himself. His name means ‘heel catcher.’ All his life he had been trying to get what other people had and pull them down while he rose above them. That was his character before he left and that is all the character that Esau knew. But now he was a different man. He was converted. Now we know that he was not perfect, but at least he knew what was right and he had a far different attitude. He wanted reconciliation. This story shows the lengths he went to achieve it.

Genesis 32:3-4 Then Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, “Speak thus to my lord Esau [notice his attitude here: “my ‘lord’ Esau”], ‘Thus your servant Jacob [“‘servant’ Jacob”—notice the way he is approaching this]. . .

What we are seeing here is that Jacob is clearly using all his knowledge of human nature or psychology to soften Esau’s heart towards him.

Genesis 32:4-8 . . . says: “I have sojourned with Laban and stayed there until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.” Then the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and he also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him” [Uh-oh, maybe his psychology did not work here]. So Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies [“I’ve got to figure out how I’m going to save this mess.”]. And he said, “If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the other company which is left will escape.”

Let us drop down to verse 13, after he had prayed to God.

Genesis 32:13 So he lodged there that same night, and took what came to his hand as a present for Esau his brother. . .

This is another length he went to help heal the breach.

Genesis 32:14-15 [Notice his present]. . . two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milk camels with their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten foals.

This is princely wealth that he is offering to Esau. But notice how he delivers them to him.

Genesis 32:16 Then he delivered them to the hand of his servants, every drove by itself. . .

Now what I see here is that they got the goats first. They had a few servants taking this flock of goats to Esau in front. And then, two hundred yards behind them, they have another bunch of servants taking a flock of sheep with the rams, driving them towards Esau. And then, two hundred yards back, you have another group of people driving the thirty milk camels and their colts. And then, behind them, you have another group driving forty cows and ten bulls. And behind them, you have another group that have the twenty female donkeys and ten foals. And it says here:

Genesis 32:16 Then he delivered them to the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, “Pass over before me, and put some distance between successive droves.”

So, he is sending these various kinds of animals and all the multitude of what he had set apart for him, one at a time. The first time it came through, he said: “Wow! Two hundred female goats and twenty male goats! That’s really great. Tell your master ‘Thanks!’” And then the next drove comes in and he says “Wow! Cool! Same number of ewes and rams! Fantastic! This is just wonderful.” Then the next herd comes in and he says “I could really use thirty camels, and look, there is the colts too! Incredible!” And it just goes on and on. Every time he gets a new set of animals, it just softens his heart more and more because his brother is honoring him with all these gifts on the hoof. So, by the time the last drove comes through, he is feeling flush with wealth and full of good favor toward Jacob.

Let us finish this.

Genesis 32:17-20 And he commanded the first one, saying, “When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, saying, ‘To whom do you belong, and where are you going? Whose are these in front of you?’ then you shall say, ‘They are your servant Jacob’s. It is a present sent to my lord Esau; and behold, he also is behind us.’ ” So he commanded the second, the third, and all who followed the droves, saying, “In this manner you shall speak to Esau when you

find him; and also say, ‘Behold, your servant Jacob is behind us.’ ”.

..

So he is ramping up every time the servant says, “This is from my lord Jacob and my lord Jacob is behind us” and then again “This is from Jacob and Jacob is behind us.” He does not know when this cycle is going to stop. It might just keep on going and going. But he is ratcheting up Esau’s excitement to meet his brother.

Genesis 32:20-21 . . . 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.” So the present went on over before him, but he himself lodged that night in the camp [and, of course, that night he had his wrestling match with the angel, who was Jesus Christ; so definitely converted by that point, if not before].

Let us go on and read the story as it works out in chapter 33.

Genesis 33:1-3 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. And he put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph last. Then he crossed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

A lot of commentators think that Jacob was so scared that he made his women and children go before him. I do not think that is the case. What I see happening here is not cowardice. Remember, we are talking about Jacob. He was a canny man. Before it was deviousness; now it was just plain smarts. He was being wise here. And he was doing the same thing with his family that he had done with the animals—he had made a succession of waves of people so Esau could see and be impressed by the family of Jacob (“Wow, this is large!”). First wave: Zilpah. Then there is Bilhah and her kids. And then there is Leah and her kids. Finally, there is Rachel and her kid. Jacob has really been blessed. He has done well for himself in these last twenty years.

But I also think there has been an element of submission here because we see it in Jacob bowing to his brother seven times. It is also a succession of things where you could see Jacob a couple of hundred yards off and he is bowing to Esau, and then he comes off several more yards and he bows again to Esau. And he does this seven times until he is finally in front of his brother. In the same way, what we can see—in both the putting his children and wives out in these successive waves and his own bowing seven times—is that he is essentially saying, “Okay brother, I am bearing my neck and the neck of all of my family. You can do with them with your four hundred men as you please.”

Of course, his bowing before his brother really shows that he is coming before him, not as the patriarch or the heir of the patriarchy of the clan; he is coming before him as his stupid younger brother who made a great mistake. And he is allowing Esau to make a judgment of how he would react. So he is putting himself totally out on the line there—all of his livestock, his wealth, all of his family, and himself also. He is saying, “I have done you wrong. Please have mercy on me.”

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

So Esau makes the right decision here. Instead of unsheathing his sword, he instead embraces his brother, glad to have him back. And he tries to give all the gifts back too. He says: “I don’t need these things. I’m pretty wealthy myself.” And Jacob says “No, you have to have them”—because he had done him so wrong, he needed to give him these gifts. So they were reconciled.

What we see here is that while Jacob showed fear and uncertainty, he does not hold back to restore to his brother at least a part of what he stole from him. He shows wisdom, generosity, humility, vulnerability, and submission so that they could resume normal relations with each other. Yet, I think if we go and read the story, they both realized that their families needed to be separated to maintain goodwill so that they would avoid hostility. But between themselves, the two brothers, there was peace and reconciliation and goodwill.

For the sake of time, I am just going to tell you this next one. You can write down Genesis 45:1-15. I may read little bits of that. I do not want to read the whole thing for lack of time. This is the third incident of reconciliation in Genesis.

It is Joseph reconciling with his brothers. It takes place over about four chapters between Genesis 42 and 45. Recall that Joseph tested his brothers in their meetings with each other. He wanted to determine what kind of men they were: whether they were honest, whether they loved their brother Benjamin, whether they loved their father Jacob. And, of course, he wanted to find out especially what kind of character Judah was, who seemed to be taking the role of the head of the family. Of course, by the end of chapter 44, you have Judah placing his own neck on the line in order to spare Benjamin. So, by chapter 45, Joseph had seen and heard enough to know that those men, who were so cruel to him, had matured. He had seen enough to determine that reconciliation was possible.

Now sometimes reconciliation is not possible. For all that you put in to it, reconciliation may not occur because the other party is either not mature enough or not converted enough (or whatever happens to be) to accept your reconciliation. So you have to do as much as you can on your end to be reconciled, and then take that before God and say “Well, I tried and I would be happy to have a good relationship with them but they are making it impossible.”

But here Joseph found that the brothers had grown up. They were no longer the mean older brothers that he had had before. They were willing to abase themselves and do whatever it took to make sure that their youngest brother (his full brother) and their father were taken care of in the best way. So he felt that it was possible.

Genesis 45:3-5 Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph; does my father still live?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come near to me.” So they came near. Then he said: “I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here. . .

“Forget about it, guys! Don’t be upset. Don’t think that I’m going to call my spearmen in here and slaughter you.” Why?

Genesis 45:5-8 . . . for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.”

I want you to notice the emphasis that Joseph puts on his history—their tumultuous history together. He says: “Guys, you thought you were being mean to me. You thought you were getting rid of a spoiled brat. But you didn’t know that God was directing everything you did, to bring me here for this moment, so that I could save Egypt and Israel.” He said “You need to understand this. There’s more happening here than you think. And I’m willing to forgive everything you’ve done to me because God is working out His will. God was working out His plan and we were caught up in it for good.” See his own humility there, his own ability to forget the hardships that he had gone through, that they had placed him in, so he could be one with them again. The lesson from Joseph’s reconciliation with his brothers is that he saw God in it and he was content.

Let us conclude in I John 3. Let us read a few verses here so we get a New Testament perspective on this, in our duty toward one another.

I John 3:10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

Down to verse 14:

I John 3:14-16 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you

know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

I John 4:20-21 If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

So, we come full circle back to the teaching of Jesus Christ in Matthew 5. We can be the most pious people in the world and know Scripture backward and forward. But if we are estranged from our brethren, we are not getting it. The two great commandments, as is emphasized over and over again, must be practiced together to be truly effective.

So let us work on, not only being reconciled to God, but also to each other.