

The God of Jacob...Controls All

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[0 : 0 0] remember on Sunday. I must start with an apology. I did have a poppy, but I've lost it somewhere over the weeks. That's bad. But I say that so as not to be a distraction. So I think it's important that we hear the word and that we listen to it. And so let me pray for that now, for wisdom and hearing God's word and listening. So Father, we pray that we would listen to you now. We pray that we'd humble our hearts before your word and try and learn from it now. Try to love you more dearly and nearly through this passage. In Jesus' name, amen. And good evening. My name is James. I'm on staff team here. And if you're new at St. Silas, tonight's a good evening to jump in because we're starting a new mini-series in the book of Genesis entitled The God of Jacob.

Jacob. And I wonder if you read through that passage. Some of that passage might have rung some bells for yourself in your own lives. Some of it might have rung incredibly true to your own lives. So we're heading up to Christmas. And if your Christmases are anything like my Christmases, it's normally the time of year when all the family baggage comes out awkwardly, isn't it?

And we see some of that in this passage, don't we? So we see the quiet sadnesses that aren't mentioned. And we see that in Rebecca and the struggles that she goes through. And we see the sibling rivalry, don't we, that this passage centers on between Jacob and Israel. It's going to lead into the following weeks. And then we see the long-standing family feuds, something that started long ago, but it's not forgotten. And that's going to carry on from this passage. Maybe that's just my family.

Does that sound familiar to you guys? Maybe not. And in this passage, what we have is the cause, the start of the absolute humdinger of family feuds. And we're going to reflect over it on the next couple of few Sunday evenings through the lens of Jacob. And it's one that lasts thousands of years right up to the New Testament. So if you're new to Genesis, I'll just give us a quick recap there. We've been looking at Genesis in our Roots Midweek groups. That's our Bible study for young workers and students. And it's written by Moses to God's people as they journey to the promised land. And it's a land that God promised to Isaac's father, Abraham, the people's great-great-great-great-grandfather. And it's a land that's going to be absolutely amazing and wonderful. But in order to get to that land, they're going to have to go through the wilderness. And between them and the land are lots and lots of enemies.

[3 : 0 5] They're the Edomites. That is the descendants of Esau, who we meet in this passage. And so Moses writing after Adam, after the flood, after Abraham, after Isaac and Jacob, after the Exodus, remember how God's people came out of Egypt, after all the plagues and the Ten Commandments and the giving of the law, he looks back to their history, to God's people, as they're heading towards the land with this great obstacle in the way. And he's trying to explain to them how it is that they're going to get there, what they need to do, and what they need to remember if they're going to get into the land.

And so the question that Moses wants them to have at the forefront of their minds throughout this passage and throughout Genesis is, will they trust the Lord or will they give up trusting the Lord, give up on his promises? And I wonder if that's something that might be true for us today. So we've had a Roots Weekend away and we spent an enormous amount of time thinking about our deaths on the Roots Weekend away. And remember, as Christians, we've got that heavenly hope that when we die, we'll enter into that heavenly land that is awaiting for us. And so we as pilgrims are heading towards that heavenly hand. And as we wander, we might ask ourselves, will we keep going? Will we keep trusting the Lord or will we give up? And one of the key verses that we find in Genesis comes right at the end of Genesis. And it's Joseph, what Joseph says to his brothers. And we remember how

Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers and goes down into Egypt. And Joseph ends up saying to his brothers, you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good. And what's he saying there? Joseph is saying, Moses is saying through Joseph that as we head to the land, whatever happens, even in the very worst situations, God is still in control. And so the plan for tonight, very simple. I'm simply going to chat through the story. We're going to work through it, make some observations on the way, and then we're going to try and pick up a couple of application points towards the end. And the three application points that I've got that we're heading towards are, they are a truth to believe, a warning to heed, and a hope to hold on to. And we'll look at those towards the end. So let's look at the story. And we pick up the action in verse 19. This is the account of the family line of Abraham's son Isaac. And why are we moving on to Isaac there? Well, it's because Abraham, that great man of faith, has died. And it's with great hope that as in this point in Genesis, we look back to Abraham's funeral.

Why? Because we remember how Abraham's wife, Sarah, had been barren. And then thinking about his funeral, Abraham is buried by his sons. And so God has given Abraham children. He's honored his promise to Abraham to give Abraham lots of descendants. And so there's still a hope that they're going to get the land.

And the next thing that we remember about Abraham's funeral, I'll just remind you of it, is that where was Abraham buried? Well, he was buried inside the land that he had been promised in a place called Mamre. Even though he was miles and miles away from the land, he instructed his sons to bury him in the land. And what was he doing? He was looking forward to the hope of when God would bring his descendants into the land and he would be in the right place. And much like Sarah, we come across the same problem in verse 21. There's a problem, isn't there? And that is Rebecca is childless.

[7 : 13] And so we start wondering, what is going to happen? Are we ever going to get the descendants to inhabit that land? But it's a bit of a relief that we read there in verse 21. I'll just pick it up for us.

We read what? That Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife. So Isaac, rather than taking things into his own hands, he prays to God. But it's not only Isaac who prays. I wonder if you notice that.

Look down there in verse 22. What do we see there? The babies were jostling within her. And she said, why is this happening to me? Rebecca's having a difficult pregnancy. And what does she do? She inquires of the Lord. So both Isaac and Rebecca, they're praying to God in complete trust and obedience. And the Lord answers Rebecca in verse 23. Don't we see that? And I'll just read the Lord's answer. He says, two nations are in your womb and two peoples from within you will be separated.

One people will be stronger than the other and the older will serve the younger. What the Lord promises Rebecca, who is childless, is that she will have an abundance of children. Two nations will come from her. And that God is promising to fulfill his promises to Abraham. That God is going to keep his word that she will have children, lots of children. And that he's going to fulfill the world with Jacob's offspring, with Abraham's offspring. And I wonder if you noticed God's sovereignty in that as well. The older will serve the younger. You see, that was very unusual for the time. Normally, it's the other way around. The older would be in charge and the younger would serve. But God is saying, it's going to be exactly the opposite because I'm in charge. The younger is going to be in charge and the older is going to serve them. And sure enough, just as the Lord has said,

[9 : 20] Rebecca gives birth to two twins. And the older comes out and he's hairy. And they name him Esau. Apparently, that means hairy in Hebrew. And as the younger comes out, he comes out and he's grasping his brother's heel. And so they name him Jacob. And Moses, having told us this, he zooms forward to when the boys are growing up. And he's going to unpack then exactly how God's promise to Rebecca in verse 23 is going to come about. And what we have there is Esau is introduced. And he sounds very impressive. I wonder if you noticed that there. Verse 27 there. The boys grew up and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country. And you can imagine perhaps a Scotsman in a ghillie suit out on the hill hunting for stag or maybe the Scotsman on the box. You've seen him. That's my idol.

One day I'll end up like him. Probably not. And he looks very impressive. But if you remember from Genesis, the last skilled hunter that we had, he wasn't a great example, was he? He was Nimrod, don't we? And we remember who Nimrod's descendants were. They were all the enemies that

God's people were going to have to face in order to get to the land. So the original hero reading this passage, his ears would have, their ears would have pricked up at this point. And they would have tut-tutted and shook their head at Esau there. And then Jacob is introduced. And as so often is the case, what do we notice about Jacob? He's the exact opposite of Esau. The bookish Jacob, he prefers to stay at home.

And then we read, what do we read in verse 28? The beginning of this family feud. What do we read? Isaac had a tasteful wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. And so there's a disunity in the family. And that's never good, is it? Parents shouldn't have favorites, should they? But I wonder if you noticed that the normally discerning Isaac there, he comes across as very ambiguous there. Remember how Isaac prayed in faith at the start of our passage? Here he seems very ambiguous, doesn't he? So we remember how Adam ate the apple, how Noah drank the wine. And here we see Isaac being persuaded by his stomach having a taste for wild game. And because he is that, he neglects to notice the warning signs about Esau that he should have been attentive to. And so as Isaac is ruled by his stomach, so is Esau in verse 29. And the action slows down here. You can imagine the scene.

Esau returns to the family home. He's been out on one of his hunting expeditions. Maybe the guys from the Roots Weekend away could appreciate. Having gone out for a long walk, they come home. And what do they do? They come in through the front door and they smell Susan and Annie's delicious cooking. And I wonder if you know that situation. You smell something beautiful and the smell hits you and you're like, you start salivating. You're like, I would really like to have some of that now. And Esau, always driven by his desires with no restraint. What does he do? He immediately asks for some.

[13:04] He's pretty blunt about it. He says literally, give me some of that red stuff. That's what it is to him, red stuff. And Jacob, who's ever quite prudent on a good deal and is always grasping after things.

He spies an opportunity here to get one over on his brother. I wonder if you've been like that, if you've got siblings. And rather than looking out for his brother and for his welfare as the firstborn and the inheritor of God's promises, he decides instead that Jacob, that he wants them for himself. And he figures out how he can get them. And so he makes a deal with Esau.

Esau here, he's so blind and he's so godless that he gives them away instantly without a second thought like that. All the riches in Babylon for a bowl of red stuff. And the language is absolutely brutal there. It's absolutely stark. He ate, he drank, he got up, he left. That's Esau in an absolute nutshell.

And normally Moses doesn't make comments on his character as he writes, but here there is absolutely no ambiguity. What does he say? He says, so Esau despised his birthright. It's a very strong word.

And it's incredibly sad, isn't it? It's the worst deal in history. You'd get fired off the apprentice for this deal. And it's the most tragic of circumstances and consequences, isn't it? And so that's the story.

[14:52] I wonder if you made of what you made of it. And so let's try and wonder what the applications are. So we've got our truth, our warning, and our hope that we're going to try and draw out from this passage. So the truth there, and I think this passage is trying to tell us, is that God is so in control that even when the very worst of things happens, even when bad things happen, they work out for good. And so when I approached this passage, I wonder if you had the same experience, is why are we reading about another childless marriage here?

Why are the two nations going on? Why is everything so hard at the beginning of Genesis? Why does Rebecca have twins? Why is Esau there? And a little later when Genesis, Moses writes down Esau's family tree, what do we find out about Esau's family tree? It's filled with God's enemies. Why does God do that? Why does he allow his people's enemies to prosper? Why did the Israelites have to face the Edomites to enter into the promised land? And why do we have struggles and hardships in life? I had a friend at Bible college who, they came to me one day and they're just so frustrated about their sin. Why is this so hard? Why do I keep sinning? I wish sin was done with and I could be with Jesus in heaven, which would be better. And why do we die? It's all so hard. Why do Christmases end so badly? And I think these are given here, these struggles and these hardships are given so that we might turn to God and rely on him more and more, even through the very hardest and tough times in life. And he puts them there so that he can show that he is the God of impossible things.

Everything about the start of Genesis and about this section is absolutely impossible. How can God fulfill his promises? Well, he can because he is God. And he shows that he's absolutely and totally in control. No matter what happens to us, not a hardship that ever reaches us, reaches us without first going through his hands to grow us that we might know him and love him more.

And so what does Romans say? 9.6. I'll just read a bit of Romans. Yet before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose and election might stand, not by works, but by him who calls, she is told, the older will serve the younger. And just as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated, what then shall I say? Is God unjust? Not at all. For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy. I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.

[17:57] And what is Paul saying in that little section of Romans there, quoting from Genesis 25? He says, the entire reason that you can have any hope in life is because God is in control. See, before Jacob and Esau had done anything in this passage, God had decided to love Jacob and allow Jacob to inherit the promises.

And that is good news because Jacob does absolutely nothing to earn God's favor. Jacob isn't a commendable character, and yet God still gives him mercy.

And then Paul goes on to quote that section, Exodus 33, when Moses has the fullest revelation of God's glory that any person will ever have. We remember how Moses begs to see God's glory.

And God says, Moses, if I showed you my glory, it would destroy you because I'm so perfect and holy. And so he tells Moses to hide himself in a crack, and his glory comes past.

And as Moses has this revelation of God's glory, how does God reveal himself to Moses? As the one who will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and the one who will have compassion on whom he will have compassion.

[19:25] And if that is true, then the warning that we should take away from this passage is that we shouldn't be like Esau, but we should be like Rebekah.

And the point of the passage is not to hold Jacob up as an example to be followed. He's not really a commendable person here. But the point is to take a warning from Esau.

You see, Esau, through no effort of his own, had inherited the greatest promises in the universe.

God was going to give him a land.

God was going to give him a people. God was going to undo all the curses that we'd seen so far in Genesis. Everything that was wrong in the world, God was going to undo through Esau and his descendants.

And bless all people through him. And what did Esau do? He threw them away for a bowl of red stuff in an instance. So as the Israelites were heading to the land with all their enemies before them, and as we approach Monday morning with all our struggles and temptations ahead of us, the question that we need to ask ourselves is, will we follow Esau or will we be like Rebekah?

[20:52] So what is the red stuff that we might be tempted to give up on God for? What are the areas of your Christian life that you're compromising in? Maybe it's money.

Maybe you think, if only I had a little bit more, then I would be satisfied. Maybe it's a relationship.

How can Jesus not approve of me going out with that person who doesn't love him?

It feels so right. Besides, Jesus will understand. Maybe it's career. Maybe if I just played this Jesus thing down a bit and got more involved in the office chat and banter and locker room talk, then maybe things would go well for me and I'd get on and move on.

And what's the warning that the author of the Hebrews gives us from this passage? He says, chapter 12, verse 16. I'll just read it for us. See that no one is sexually immoral or godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the eldest son.

Afterwards, as you know, he wanted to inherit the blessing, but he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

[22:10] And the truth is that on the final day, when Jesus returns, there will be no tears in heaven. Jesus will wipe away every tear, every sadness, every disappointment, every hardship in life.

But outside of Jesus, outside of God's kingdom, outside of trusting God's promises, there will be lots of tears and lots of crying and lots of gnashing of teeth.

And so as we wander, as we go on our heavenly journey towards heaven, we shouldn't be like Esau, but we should turn to God in faith like Rebecca.

Rebecca, this incredibly beautiful picture, isn't it, of someone struggling in faith through hardship, but still trusting. Just look down at verse 22.

I'll read it again for a while. What does she say? Why is this happening to me? I wonder if you've ever cried that. Why is this happening to me? And what does she do? She went to inquire of the Lord.

[23 : 17] So in the light of who God is, will we be faithful like Rebecca and pray in faith to God, trusting that no matter how hard life gets, God is still at work for good, even through the hardest of circumstances, for his glory and for our salvation.

And the reason that we can pray with confidence that prayer is the hope that we hold. And this is the third thing that we're going to draw out there, the hope.

That is, Jesus conquers all God's enemies. See, the problem that you and I face is that we are all exactly like Esau. We're all godless.

We all give up on God and follow our own desires. We're all pulled away by sin and temptation.

None of us here follows God perfectly.

And what's more, God still remains the same. He remains still perfect and glorious, hating sin but calling us to trust in his promises. And if that is true, then the only hope that we can ever have in this world is trusting in Jesus.

[24 : 33] You see, Jesus lived the perfect life and loved God perfectly. Jesus could see God's glory in its fullness. And Jesus lived the life that we could never live.

And he died the death that we could never die, so that we could be with God in glory. And see, when Jesus faced up to the peoples, then the Old Testament Israelites' enemy, we remember that Edomite king, a Herod, one of Esau's descendants.

Herod stood idly by as the Romans crucified Jesus. And as Jesus faced our greater enemies of sin and death on our heavenly journey at the cross, Jesus conquered them.

And as God raised Jesus up to life again, he declared Jesus the one true king over everything and turned the greatest evil in the world, the murder of God, into the greatest good for the world, for his glory and for our salvation.

Let me pray. So, Father, we thank you for this wonderful story.

[25 : 52] We thank you for the hope that it gives us. We thank you for the picture of you that it gives us. And we pray that we'll draw nearer to you each day in faith like Rebecca.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.