

The God of Jacob....is Never Thwarted

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Preacher: Michael Reader-Harris

[0 : 0 0] 26. So in the church Bibles, it's on page 28. We've got a long Bible reading tonight we're looking at, so we're just going to divide it into two through the evening just to help us focus on it before Michael comes and explains it for us. So we're doing Genesis chapter 6 beginning at verse 34 on page 28 of the church Bibles.

Verse 34. When Esau was 40 years old, he married Judith, daughter of Beri the Hittite, and also Basimath, daughter of Elon the Hittite. They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebecca.

When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for his elder son Esau and said to him, my son, here I am, he answered. Isaac said, I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death. Now then get your equipment, your quiver and bow, and go out to the open country and hunt some wild game for me. Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat so that I may give you my blessing before I die. Now Rebecca was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back, Rebecca said to her son Jacob, look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the Lord before I die. Now my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you. Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats so that I can prepare some tasty food for your father just the way he likes it. Then take it to your father to eat so that he may give you his blessing before he dies. Jacob said to Rebecca, his mother, but my brother Esau is a hairy man while I have smooth skin. What if my father touches me? I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a curse on myself rather than a blessing. His mother said to him, my son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say. Go and get them for me.

So he went and got them and brought them to his mother and she prepared some tasty food just the way his father liked it. Then Rebecca took the best clothes of her elder son Esau, which she had in the house and put them on her younger son Jacob. She also covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goat skins. Then she handed to her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made.

So yeah, we'll read the second part of this passage in a moment. Before we do that, there's a few other things we're going to look at before we get there. And it is 27 verses 18 to 41.

[3 : 3 0] He went to his father and said, my father. Yes, my son, he answered. Who is it? Jacob said to his father, I am Esau, your firstborn. I have done as you have told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game so that you may give me your blessing. Isaac asked his son, how did you find it so quickly, my son?

The Lord your God gave me success, he replied. Then Isaac said to Jacob, come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not. Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, the voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.

He did not recognize him for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau. So he proceeded to bless him. Are you really my son Esau? He asked. I am, he replied.

Then he said, my son, bring me some of your game to eat so that I may give you my blessing. Jacob brought it to him and he ate and he brought some wine and he drank. Then his father Isaac said to him, come here, my son, and kiss me. So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said, ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed. May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness, an abundance of grain and new wine. May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be Lord over your brothers and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed.

After Isaac finished blessing him and Jacob had scarcely left his father's presence, his brother Esau came in from the hunting. He too prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father.

[5 : 34] Then he said to him, my father, please sit up and eat some of my game so that you may give me your blessing. His father Isaac asked him, who are you? I am your son, he answered, your firstborn Esau.

Isaac trembled violently and said, who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him and indeed he will be blessed.

When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, bless me, me too, my father. But he said, your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.

Esau said, isn't he rightly named Jacob? This is the second time he has taken advantage of me. He took my birthright and now he's taking my blessing.

Then he asked, haven't you reserved any blessing for me? Isaac answered Esau, I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So what can I possibly do for you, my son?

[6 : 44] Esau said to his father, do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father. Then Esau wept aloud. His father Isaac answered him, your dwelling will be away from the earth's richness, away from the dew of heaven above.

You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grew restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck. Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him.

He said to himself, the days of mourning for my father are near, then I will kill my brother Jacob. This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Let's pray as we sit.

May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Well, what a passage, isn't it? It's an exciting story. It's part of our culture. It's probably a story that we all know at least part of. But I expect there are some bits that you've heard tonight and seen for the first time.

[8 : 02] Certainly, as I looked at it, there were things that I hadn't seen before and I really enjoyed seeing now. So I want to go through the story in some detail. Keep your Bibles open at page 28.

There's a sort of outline in the notice sheet, but most of it's pretty basic. Just dividing the story up into eight scenes. So the story starts, those first couple of verses that we were doing at the end of 26.

It's a story about Esau. And what we see at the very beginning of the story is it's not good news. Whom you marry is important.

And Esau makes a jolly bad choice. He shouldn't have chosen wives from those round about. He shouldn't have chosen Hittite wives because the danger of local wives was that they might lead people into becoming assimilated to local practices.

He should have looked further away, as indeed Isaac had. But basically, the thing we've discovered about Esau, both in the previous reading and in last week and now, is that he's governed by his appetites.

[9 : 21] Last week, it was about food, wanting the stew. This week, it's about he wants these two local women to marry. We'll think a bit more about Esau in a moment.

The next main character is the first verses of chapter 27. And that's Isaac. Now, I think Isaac's always rather in the shadow of his greater father, of Abraham.

If I were to ask you about the two of them, you'd be able to tell me loads about Abraham, and you'd go, well, yes, Isaac, I suspect. Maybe you'd say, dug a lot of wells, or some other interesting fact about him.

But we do know something about his spiritual life. There was quite a long delay before he had a child. He prayed, and then he had two.

The Lord appeared to him, not once, but more. And he built an altar. But compared with Abraham, I think he plodded along.

[10 : 33] And yet, he is one of the men of faith referred to in Hebrews. But he had a blind spot. He wasn't willing to accept God's will as regards the covenant succession.

He wasn't willing to accept that actually it was going to be Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was determined it was going to be Esau. Now, he clearly knew what God had said to Rebekah, that their eldest son would serve the younger.

He must have known that, because otherwise he wouldn't have gone through this very secret passing on of the blessing. I mean, the normal way with a blessing, I understand, was that it was a public event.

It was a bit like reading a will. He starts in a very sort of strange, special way. I am now an old man, and don't know the day of my death.

I think that's a little bit like saying, this is going to be the last will and testament of Isaac. And it should happen publicly. If you think of what happens when Jacob is coming up to the end of his life, there's a huge event, and it starts with the words, Jacob called for his sons and said, gather round.

[11 : 57] But that wasn't what Isaac did. He just gathered the son he loved, and was going to bless him privately. And he hadn't really operated well towards his children.

He should have sent Esau off, I think, to get a wife from elsewhere, rather as had been done for him, as Abraham had arranged that Rebecca should be his wife, so he could have done something for Esau.

But Esau was his favorite, and what Esau wanted, Esau got, and Isaac didn't do anything to stop it. So Isaac was a bit like Esau.

They were both dominated by appetite. He was very keen on food. Now get your equipment, go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me.

Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like. That's what he really wanted. Isaac was a man of God, but he had a blind spot about the future, and he had a blind spot about his favorite son.

[13 : 08] And that caused a tremendous problem. Then what about the third scene, verse 5? It's about Rebecca.

Now Rebecca was very attractive in her youth. The woman was very beautiful, it says in 24, verse 16. But she wasn't only beautiful to see.

She was kind. She drew water for Abraham's servants' camels. It was a great marriage at first. Rebecca became Isaac's wife, and he loved her, and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

But now it's not so great, is it? Because she's suspicious of what her husband's going to do. She's not very impressed by Isaac's spirituality.

C.T. Studd said that the best test of a sanctified man is to ask his family about him. I think if you'd asked Rebecca about Isaac, she'd have said, he's a bit dodgy, especially about the children, especially about the children, and about where the covenant's going when he goes.

[14 : 27] So, she's listening outside. She actually knows what's going on. And she overhears what Isaac's doing.

Had she expected that Isaac was going to do this? Maybe she had. And there's a wonderful thing that William Taylor pointed out to me in verses 5 and 6.

I don't know whether you noticed it when it was being read. If I read the first half of verse 5 and the first half of verse 6, you'll see it. Now, Rebecca was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau.

And then in verse 6, Rebecca said to her son, Jacob. Jacob. Well, they were twins, weren't they? They didn't really have a son each. They both had two sons.

But they behaved as if they each had a son. Because they each had a favorite. And favoritism has terrible consequences. But in some ways, you can't help admiring Rebecca.

[15 : 28] I mean, she's a very powerful woman. Is the phrase, a tiger mum, the right one nowadays? I mean, now, my son, verse 8, listen carefully and do what I tell you.

Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats. You know, I've got a plan. We've got to do it really quickly. Maybe she'd been thinking about this for a while. She moves fast.

She gets it all sorted. Despite Jacob's doubts about the plan, the obvious doubts about whether it's really a harebrained scheme that could easily go wrong, whatever, she just says, go for it.

She's obviously a good cook. That's something we know about Rebecca because she's going to make Esau's signature dish. The special game meal that he can make.

Well, she's going to make it and she's going to make it as well as he does and she's going to make it with goat. And somehow, it's going to be believed that it's venison and it's going to be all wonderful.

[16 : 36] Maybe she'd been hurt over the years that although she did a lot of the cooking, people seemed to think the best thing they ever had was Esau's special meal. Well, tonight, she was going to make Esau's special meal and it was going to be perfect.

Martin Luther was very impressed by Rebecca's plan. A very beautiful stratagem, I gather he called it.

I've only quoted that from someone else quoting Martin Luther. I haven't actually looked it up. But, although it was clever, I think Rebecca's fault was that she didn't trust God to work out his plan.

She's right about the ends. She's right that Jacob should get the blessing. That is God's plan. That's what must happen. But, does the ends justify the means?

I don't think so. There's a huge amount of dishonesty in the next part of the story. And, all that dishonesty leads to tremendous suffering for all the people involved.

[17 : 45] They all reap the consequences of their sins in different ways. We'll see that as we go along. The question, I suppose the challenge to us is, are we willing to do God's will in the right way, in God's way?

The fact that something's at a good end doesn't mean that you can get there any way you like because the end is good. I think that's one of the things we learn from this passage. Yes, she was right about the end, whereas Isaac was dodgy about the end.

But it didn't solve, but the issues come out as we go through. Then, scene four, starting at verse 11, is the problem. Jacob said to Rebecca, his mother, when the unforgettable, slightly bogus, slightly artificial translation, my brother Esau is a hairy man, but I am a smooth man.

And, that's the problem. I mean, if you meet, when he comes in, how is he not going to be recognized? How is Isaac not going to spot that this is actually Jacob dressed up as Esau?

Well, the thing is, mother's ready. She's got a plan. Tasty food. So it'll appear to be the right food. She's got Esau's clothes.

[19 : 12] So the smell will be right. She's got goat skins, which she's going to put over him so that when Isaac touches, he'll go, yeah, Esau. And, she's sure that this is going to work out and that the goat skins won't fall off.

You can just imagine, we can easily think of all the ways in which this can end in disaster. And when Jacob begins to doubt whether this is a good plan, she just says, my son, let the curse fall on me.

Just do what I say. Go and get on with it. It's a rush. Come on. We're going to win. We're going to make sure that my son beats my husband's son.

And so, that's the plan. And then we come to scene five and the story really slows down. We see Jacob in action.

This is a relatively small amount of time described in great detail. And as we hear the story described, the question is always, will Esau come back before all this is over?

[20 : 19] We, of course, know the answer to that because, well, we've just heard it read to us and we've probably heard the story before. So Jacob goes to his father and says, my father.

That's the real problem. As soon as he opens his mouth, daddy goes, huh? This is really confusing. I was expecting Esau and I seem to have someone that seems awfully like Jacob.

Now, it's interesting as we go through the story, we can see all the different, we can see all his senses in action. Except his sight, we know he's blind, but the other four senses all go into action and we also see his brain.

He's not completely stupid. He actually is able to think as well. Voice is the real problem. Jacob said, my father.

Isaac answered, yes, my son. Who is it? And later on, verse 22, Jacob went close to his father Isaac. The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.

[21 : 34] But, and this is the awful thing, the problem with his voice is answered by Jacob with a straight lie. Jacob said, I am Esau, your firstborn.

Are you really my son Esau? I am, Jacob replied. Now, touch wasn't a problem. Verses 22 and 23, that worked really well.

He didn't recognize, Isaac didn't recognize Jacob, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau. So that was great. Well, from Jacob's point of view. But Isaac was, he had a brain that worked too.

How did you find it so quickly, my son? You know, you had to go off and shoot it and come back and, you know, they didn't seem to bother with hanging the meat. They just seemed to eat it at once.

But even so, how is it so quick? And perhaps that's the worst bit of the whole story. The Lord, your God, gave me success. The thing was, Isaac couldn't call anyone in to check, you know, to point out where this was, Jacob or Esau, because he was all doing it secretly, doing it all secretly.

[22 : 54] If he'd done it the way he was, the proper way, there wouldn't have been any problem because there would have been all these witnesses who'd know who was being blessed. But Isaac couldn't do that because he'd done it wrong.

But as you might suspect, it was taste that was the really key issue. When he ate the food and the food was really delicious, he ate and Jacob brought him some wine and he drank and he was having a great meal and his appetite was being satisfied and he said, well, it's good enough for me.

I'm a man of appetite. And then smell backed it up. Esau's clothes and he had the right sort of open air smell, whatever that is. Best not think too much.

Might spoil your next biscuit. But it is very dramatic and then he blesses him.

And he gets the blessing that Isaac chooses to give him. Heaven's due and earth's richness. Be lord over your brothers and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.

[24 : 16] And he does get that blessing. But he does pay a heavy price. Because later on we'll see how the deceiver gets deceived by Laban.

A trick's played on him on his wedding night which is just as memorable really in terms of the Bible story. So he gets what he deserves.

And Rebecca does too. It seems that she never sees Jacob again after this. Certainly no mention of the meeting again.

And then scene six Esau returns after Isaac had finished blessing him and Jacob had scarcely left his father's presence.

His brother Esau came in from hunting. I mean when they were born Jacob comes in on Esau's heels.

[25 : 17] Now Esau comes in on Jacob's heels. And his father Isaac asked him the memorable question who are you? I'm your son he answered your firstborn Esau.

Oh dear. Isaac trembled violently says in the Hebrew a very great trembling. And his words are very significant I think in the story.

Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him. And indeed he will be blessed. I think at this critical point in the story Isaac has discovered and accepted God's will having never accepted it up to this point.

Up to this point he's been trying to manipulate it so it's going to be Esau. now he realizes that you can't thwart God and that God is working out his will and it's going to be Jacob and he accepts it he will be blessed.

He bows to God's choice and Esau is furious. He bursts out with a loud and bitter cry. He's resentful. This is the second time he's taken advantage of me.

[26 : 46] He took my birthright and now he's taken my blessing. That's a bit rich coming from Esau. He actually sold the birthright if you remember last time.

But anyway that's how Esau sees it. He says haven't you reserved a blessing for me? Do you have only one blessing my father?

So he gets a blessing. But it's not the blessing he wanted. But that's the way it is. They tried to thwart God and they failed.

Esau had traded his birthright for a stew. Now he was tricked out of his blessing by a stew. And he says Jacob's name's always been appropriate.

Jacob says at the bottom Jacob means he grasps the heel. A Hebrew idiom for he takes advantage of or he deceives. That's why he's called Jacob.

[27 : 53] He's a deceiver. And Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. And in scene seven he's making plans to kill Jacob.

And of course Rebecca's equally in action as usual. She makes plans that Jacob will survive and it'll work out well for him.

And in a strange way of course it does work out well for him because she quickly sends him off to Laban to brother Laban to find a wife. And as usual Jacob does what he's told.

And again we see that Isaac steps up that after all the disaster of not following God and just trying to work it out his own way suddenly has this great prayer for Jacob as he goes off to Paddan Aram.

May God Almighty El Shaddai bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples may he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner the land God gave to Abraham that's 28 verses 3 and 4 so in those verses he really is now passing on the covenant blessing the covenant blessing of descendants lots of them the covenant blessing of the special land that they're going to have and in the end Isaac comes through but the sad thing is that Esau doesn't the very end of the story where I'm supposed to finish tonight at verse 9 is that Esau he had at least discovered that the Canaanite Hittite women were not pleasing to his father so his solution to the problem is to get another wife and this is going to

[30 : 03] Ishmael it's not made clear whether this is a good plan or not is he just satisfying his appetites more women certainly isn't the best idea that he could have so let's think a little bit more about Esau I want there's a couple of verses going to come up on the screen in a second because there's a cross reference and there's a cross reference to Esau in Hebrews and if you look at verse 16 in the first passage up on the screen Esau is characterized by the fact that if you look at verse 15 Esau is someone from whom a bitter root grows up characterized by immorality and godlessness and the bitter root gives us back to a second reference in

Deuteronomy that's it Esau Esau seems to be the example that Hebrews gives of godlessness one who hears God's word he grew up in that great family and yet he carries on doing his own thing he ultimately puts his appetites first and goes his own way in sexual immorality and disobedience and in the end we see a bitter cry he's a terrible warning to us that one can be on the edge of God's family perhaps apparently in God's family and yet ultimately end up lost through poor choices that was my point

B I had to swap around B and A because I wanted to end up in a less depressing place I wanted to end up with point A which is my final point which is that God cannot be thwarted I think that's probably the central theme of the whole story despite Isaac and Esau's attempts they completely failed Jacob was blessed now it wasn't that Jacob was worthy I'm not going to talk about Jacob tonight you'll be glad I'm just finishing but actually you're going to have several weeks looking at Jacob and you'll see how Jacob gradually changes or is changed but Jacob was clearly very unworthy in our story but God in his grace chose to bless him the first readers of Genesis must have been struck by the fact that they didn't deserve salvation but that they like Jacob received it as a gift and that's true for us today as well there are lots of examples in the

Bible of God bringing to pass what he planned God not being thwarted I think my favourite one is the one I've put a reference to we don't need to look it up Acts 4 28 it's that great prayer of the believers I'll just read 27 and 28 and you'll know the story the believers in Acts pray indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed they did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen they that's the Pontius Pilate et al had a plan they thought they could thwart Jesus they thought they could cut him down but he leapt up high God through the cross worked out his eternal plan he wasn't thwarted by human beings attempts he worked out his will and it's very encouraging that God works out his will that God cannot be thwarted it's challenging that there's a cost if we try to thwart it we saw that happen to all well two of them who tried to thwart it and two who tried to work it out in a way that was not right you see sometimes these things could have been worked out right we don't know how it could have been done but I love that bit at the end of

Genesis 48 when Jacob's doing the blessing for Manasseh and Ephraim and Manasseh is the elder of Joseph's sons and so Manasseh is put by Joseph underneath Jacob's right hand and Ephraim under the left and Jacob just goes oomph like that and then Joseph says no father oomph and Jacob says sorry that's the way it is and he prays and they are blessed that seems to be an example of doing it right publicly and doing it the way that God insists that it should be done as we look at our lives with all their stresses we do thank God that his plans come to pass we are amazed really when we look at this story of this pretty dysfunctional family that God says of them that he's the

[36 : 27] God of Abraham the God of Isaac the God of Jacob if he can work out his plan through this pretty difficult material and their very difficult relationships with one another he can work out his plan through our church with all our failures with all our temptations to be an Isaac with a blind spot or Rebecca trying to work it out our way with a dodgy scheme or whatever it is or if we're a Jacob who is far from doing it God's way and still has a long way to grow but God can't be thwarted whichever character we identify with perhaps tonight we can pray that if we have a blind spot that God would help us to see more clearly and behave better if we're into dodgy schemes that we'd trust him to do it his way and if we're an Esau that we would turn to

God in repentance and faith let's pray as we sit father we do thank you for this extraordinary story thank you that you work out your purpose in history above all in the cross you work it out through people with through poor raw material with people like us and now we pray that you would help us both to thank you for your love and grace you'd help us to turn away from our blind spots and accept your will to turn away from dodgy schemes and to repent and trust you for eternity for we ask it in Jesus name Amen

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