

36. The Certainty of the Covenant (2007)

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Date: 01 April 2012

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our reading for this morning and we're back again in the book of Genesis. And we come this morning to Genesis chapter 27.

We're going to read in from the last couple of verses of chapter 26 which begins this section of the story and we read into chapter 28 at verse 9.

And once again let's just notice as we read that this story is held in brackets. The first two verses there, the last couple of verses of chapter 26 and the last little bit that we'll read in chapter 28, both about Esau and his wives.

That's the little frame that this whole story is held in. And it helps us to see I think what the writer is trying to tell us. So Genesis 26 and verse 34. When Esau was 40 years old, he took Judith, the daughter of Beerli the Hittite, to be his wife, and Basemath, the daughter of Elon the Hittite.

And they made life bitter. Or more literally as the footnote says, they were bitterness of spirit for Isaac and Rebekah. When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau, his oldest son, and said to him, My son.

[1 : 26] And he answered, Here I am. He said, Behold, I am old. I do not know the day of my death. Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go to the field and hunt game for me. And prepare for me the delicious food such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, and my soul may bless you before I die.

Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, I heard your father speak to your brother Esau.

Bring me game and prepare for me delicious food that I may eat it, and bless you before the Lord before I die. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice as I command you.

Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, so that I may prepare for them delicious food for your father such as he loves. And you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.

But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I'll seem to be mocking him and bring a curse upon myself. And not a blessing.

[2 : 38] His mother said to him, Let your curse be on me, my son. Only obey my voice and go, bring them to me. So he went and took them and brought them to his mother, and his mother prepared delicious food such as his father loved.

Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau, her older son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob, her younger son. And the skins of the young goats she put on his hands, and on the smooth part of his neck.

And she put the delicious food and the bread which she had prepared into the hand of her son Jacob. So he went into his father and said, My father. And he said, Here I am.

Who are you, my son? Jacob said to his father, I am Esau, your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me.

But Isaac said to his son, How is it that you'd find it so quickly, my son? He answered, Because the Lord your God granted me success. Then Isaac said to Jacob, Please come near that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.

[3 : 47] So Jacob went near to Isaac, his father, who felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. And he didn't recognize him because his hands were hairy, like his brother Esau's hands.

So he blessed him. And he said, Are you really my son Esau? He answered, I am. And he said, Bring it near me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you.

So he brought it near him and he ate, and he brought him wine and he drank. Then his father Isaac said to him, Come near me and kiss me, my son. So he came near and kissed him.

And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments. And he blessed him and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed.

May God give you of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine. Let people serve you and nations buy down to you. Be Lord over your brothers and may your mother's sons buy down to you.

[4 : 49] Cursed be everyone who curses you and blessed be everyone who blesses you. As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau, his brother, came in from his hunting.

He also prepared delicious food and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, Let my father arise in each of his sons game, that you may bless me. Father Isaac said to him, Who are you? He answered, I'm your son, your firstborn, Esau. Then Isaac trembled very violently and said, Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me and I ate it before you came and I have blessed him?

Yes, and he shall be blessed. As soon as Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry.

And he said to his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father. But he said, Your brother came deceitfully and he has taken away your blessing. Esau said, Is he not rightly named Jacob?

[5 : 58] He has cheated me these two times. He took away my birthright and behold, now he has taken away my blessing. And he said, Have you not reserved a blessing for me? Isaac answered and said to Esau, Behold, I have made him lord over you and all his brothers I have given to him for servants and with grain and wine I have sustained him.

What then can I do for you, my son? Esau said to his father, Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

And Isaac his father answered and said to him, Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be and away from the dew of heaven on high. By your sword you shall live and you shall serve your brother.

But when you grow restless, you shall break his yoke from your neck. Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him.

And Esau said to himself, The days of mourning for my father are approaching. Then I will kill my brother Jacob. But the words of Esau, her older son, were told to Rebekah.

[7 : 13] So she sent and called Jacob, her youngest son, and said to him, Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you by planning to kill you. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, arise, flee to Laban, my brother in Haran, and stay with him a while until your brother's fury turns away, until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you've done to him.

Then I'll send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereft of both of you in one day? Then Rebekah said to Isaac, I loathe my life because of the Hittite women.

If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me? And Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him, You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women.

Arise, go to Paddan Aram, to the house of Bethul, your mother's father, and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples.

May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham. Thus Isaac sent Jacob away and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban, the son of Bethul, the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob and Esau's mother.

[8 : 42] Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan Aram to take a wife from there. And that as he blessed him, he directed him, you must not take a wife from the Canaanite women.

And that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan Aram. So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac, his father, Esau went to Ishmael and took as

his wife, besides the wives he had, Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth.

Amen. May God bless to us this, his word. Well, if you would turn to the passage that we read, Genesis chapter 27, and the few verses before and after, which are all about the certainty of God's covenant.

Unless the church wakes up and grasps its calling, God can't do what he wants to do to bring blessing in our world today.

That was the message from an enthusiastic preacher I heard on the Sunday service on the radio just a few weeks ago. And I think that is a very depressing message, don't you?

[10:07] Just how perfect do we have to be before God is enabled to do what he wants to do? Seems to me that if God's purposes for the world depend on people, even Christian people, then our world does not have a very great deal of hope, does it?

But the good news about what the Bible actually teaches us is that God's future is not in the hands of the church. In fact, it's exactly the other way around. The church's future, and therefore the world's blessing through the promise that the church carries is entirely in God's hands and in God's power.

Now Moses knew that way back in the time of the wanderings in the desert with the people of Israel when he wrote this book of Genesis and indeed the next four books of the Bible when he wrote them to teach his people about God.

And at the very end of the life of Moses, he was still a complete realist. After I die, he said to the people, you will go on in your sinful and rebellious ways.

And so he taught them at the end of the book of Deuteronomy a song to sing to remind them of God's goodness and also God's judgments upon sin. You can read it in Deuteronomy chapter 32.

[11:25] But he also went on to pronounce God's certain blessing even upon this wayward people because, he said, you're a people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help and the sword of your triumph.

God's people were entrusted with the oracles of God. What if some were unfaithful, says Paul in Romans chapter 3.

Does their faithfulness, faithlessness, nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means, he says. And no, says Jesus, likewise.

Do you remember Peter's great confession of Christ as the Messiah? And immediately Jesus says, on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Even though the weakness of the apostles themselves was immediately evident. And Jesus, in almost his next breath, has to rebuke Peter for being prey to Satan and his wiles.

[12:29] But you see, God's future and his purpose is not dependent upon the power of his people, his church. Rather, his church and all his flawed and sinful covenant people in it, their future lies in the hand of the covenant God.

And that covenant is certain. God's determined commitment to do what he has promised and what he has planned will triumph over all human perversity and failing.

Always. I will build my church and even the very gates of hell will not prevail against it. And this story here in Genesis chapter 27 surely underlines that in triplicate for us.

It's a story of total dysfunction within the covenant family. And yet even that cannot afford the determination of the covenant God to bring about everything that he has promised with effortless precision.

Notice the heading in chapter 27 in our ESV Bibles. It gets it exactly right, doesn't it? In the midst of all the complicated shenanigans that unfolds, these three words tell us that what God has commanded, the oracle about the twins before even their birth, that what God has planned will come to pass no matter what man might say and do.

[13:58] Isaac blesses Jacob. Jacob. The older will serve the younger as God had said. And not even a patriarch, not even the devil himself can derail God's plan by one iota.

God's covenant is certain. He is a sovereign God. And yet the ensuing consequences for everybody involved in this story, they also remind us that sin, especially sin within the family of faith, that sin does have consequences.

God is sovereign, but we also are responsible for our actions in seeking to flight God's revealed commands. So this story is also a story of great warning, isn't it, for God's people in his covenant

family, the church.

But it is a story of great hope. hope. It's not just a moral tale about the consequences of lies and deception and so on. It is a wonderful reminder that God's perfect will shall be done, even in a fallen world, and even through a fallen and a very faulty church.

As William Stillis put it, it reminds us that despite his worst efforts, the devil outwits himself in the sphere of his own disintegrating bedlam. And God does use even the worst evil in the heart of man to bring about his own purposes of grace and mercy.

[15 : 35] So let's look at this story then and let's see what we are to learn about the great certainty of God's covenant despite the uncertainty and the downright sin of God's covenant people. As I said, you see the stories in brackets, the last two verses of chapter 26 and the last few verses we read, verses 6 to 9 of chapter 28, both speak about Esau's marriages, marriages to enemies of the covenant people of God.

And then in between we have some five scenes that unfold, each of which is focused on a dialogue between two of the main characters. And the centerpiece is verses 18 to 29 where Jacob receives the blessing from Isaac and God's word in the oracle is fulfilled.

And yet, none of the actors in this drama can claim any credit at all, can they? Even though they do achieve the director's intent.

Let's look at them in turn then, these actors, as the story presents them to us. The first scene, the beginning of chapter 27, presents us with Isaac as the main focus in verses 1 to 5.

And the all overriding picture here is one of defiance. Isaac's defiant challenge to God as he seeks to bless Esau despite God's clear command and despite Esau's manifest contempt for the covenant and its future.

[17 : 02] It surely reveals that Isaac's focus is far more in his own pleasure than in God's promise. There can be no doubt at all about Isaac's deliberate defiance of God here.

First of all, he knew the oracle of God spoken before their birth that the blessing of Abraham would be through the younger son, not the older son. And then second, he knew, surely, Esau's contempt for his birthright.

He sold it for a single meal because he despised it. And just in case we don't grasp exactly what that means, then thirdly, we're told immediately in the verses prior to chapter 27 of Esau's flagrant disregard for God's command about purity in the covenant family.

Abraham insisted that Isaac should not have a wife from these cursed Canaanite people. But Esau, Esau takes not just one, but two cursed wives.

And it caused bitterness of spirit, we're told, intense anguish and heartache to his parents. Isaac must have known in doing what he was doing that he was on a headlong clash with God.

[18 : 17] Perhaps that's why he was so clandestine about it. Talks to Esau privately on his own, arranges a private blessing ceremony in his tent instead of making it public and with all the family.

And everybody gathered round as he blessed all the children in his household. Read Genesis 49 for how it should have happened as it did with Jacob and his family later.

Why is he doing this? Why is Isaac doing this in defiance of God despite all his previous faith, his prayerfulness and so on?

It's sad, says William still again, when the Lord's servants lived long enough to undo the work of their glorious years. What is driving Isaac here?

Well, it seems, to use Paul's words later, that his God is his stomach. The key words all through this chapter are about food, aren't they?

[19 : 18] Eight times game is mentioned. Six times delicious food such as Isaac loves. We remember, don't we, it was trailed back in chapter 25 verse 28, Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game.

As Derek Kidna said, his palate had long since guided his heart. Gourmet appetites, it seems, had derailed his gospel appetite.

The pleasure in his palate had overtaken his pleasure in God's promise. That's a sad picture, isn't it? But it's not that uncommon. Once again, I find William still writing with great realism.

We should be in our guard, he says, against the temptation to misjudge Christian people who in their dotage contradict the whole former tenor of their lives. It's painful for loved ones to see a dear one acting so distressingly, but it is a reminder that the devil does not easily let go.

It may be especially malevolent when the worn-out body is too feeble to resist. The devil doesn't let go of us, does he, as we get older?

[20 : 35] And we're all frail, we're all dust. Some of you young folk think that temptations are going to be a thing of the past when you reach your 30s or your 40s or your 70s or your 80s. Think again.

Speak to some of the older folk in the congregation, they'll tell you. Well, here Isaac, you see, allows his earthly appetites to cloud his judgment about the most important matter for any man, certainly for any father.

That is his family's future in God's covenant purposes. He knows God's word, he knows Esau's disregard for his birthright, for all the responsibilities of covenant life.

But Isaac rationalizes, it seems, he pretends. As Calvin says, greater than the blindness of his eyes was the blindness to Esau's ungodliness.

Yes, he was grieved greatly at Esau's disregard for God's commands about marriage. He was grieved by these unholy partnerships, and yet he seems to pretend to himself that really these things are not that important.

[21 : 45] And he thinks that he can just perhaps bless it all the same instead of calling Esau to repent. But the church of God can't just bless what God calls sin.

God won't be used in that way. And yet Isaac thinks he can, so he is defiant in his challenge to God. Well, the next scene, verse 5, begins Rebecca's part in all of this, and surely it's a story all of deviousness.

Rebecca's devious circumvention of her husband betrays a focus that however well-intentioned and well-motivated and however covenant-honoring she wants to be, is surely more trusting in her own planning than in God's power and in God's providence.

We're told Rebecca's listening in when Isaac speaks to Esau. It's hardly a sign of a harmonious marriage really, is it? You do wonder how much lasting damage was done by the business in gear back in chapter 26 when Isaac, to save his own neck, was willing to put his wife in such danger. We don't know. But Rebecca does clearly trust God's oracle. She knows just how significant the blessing is going to be.

[23 : 09] Verse 7, it's a blessing before the Lord. In other words, it's that word of promise uttered in faith before God that is going to transmit this blessing to her son.

And so there's nothing more important in life for her and her family's future. And she's right in that concern. But her husband is failing in his God-given duty to lead her in that way.

That's very hard, isn't it, when a Christian wife doesn't have a strong Christian husband. When she doesn't have that strong spiritual lead in the home that there ought to be, that can be agony, can't it, for a godly Christian wife?

I know that. I've heard many pour out their heart to me about it. Peter, in his letter, doesn't he, he tells us the right way to handle that situation in 1 Peter 3.

She's to win over her husband by her respectful and pure conduct. But often you see a strong wife, and Rebecca was a strong wife, remember? Chapter 24, a strong woman, an active woman, a ten camel woman.

[24 : 21] What Dick Lucas would call an EPW, an extremely powerful woman. That was Rebecca. And sometimes, in that situation, a strong woman wants to channel her frustrations through manipulating her husband, perhaps controlling her whole family indeed.

And where that's the case, it rarely does have a happy ending, and Rebecca does take that route, doesn't she, of devious circumvention of her husband, who's failing in his spiritual duties. So, again, let's be careful before we slam poor Rebecca.

It was hard for her, and indeed, she had real faith. Her spiritual judgment was sound, her motivation was right. But, here's the thing, it's possible, isn't it, to have all the right motivations in pursuing a gospel cause, and yet still to go off in a wrong way, in a misguided way.

once again, I think John Calvin gets the balance right, in my view. Certainly, he says, Rebecca's strategy was at fault. She didn't have to deceive her husband, and yet, clearly her action was from faith.

And so often, it's true of us, too, isn't it, as God's people, that as Calvin says, our faith is enveloped in various clouds of ignorance and error. That's true of all of us, isn't it?

[25 : 44] Sometimes we're going on the right course, we're heading for the right goal, and yet we slide and we make a mess of it, and our judgment is poor. Well, I think that's Rebecca.

She was faithful, but she's flawed. And she's too focused on her own planning, her own controlling, and not enough on God's providence and God's power.

And yet, she is sure that God's promise and his blessing is the most important thing for her family's future. And she says in verse 13 that she's even willing to be cursed herself to make sure that her family are blessed in God's plan.

Now, again, when you read the commentators, almost everyone slams her for that sort of saying, but I can't help when I read that, I can't help thinking about Paul's words in Romans chapter 9 when he says of himself, I would rather be cursed if my kith and kin could only share in the blessing of the covenant promise of God.

Well, I think Rebecca cherishes God's promise, even though, yes, her actions are enveloped in clouds of ignorance and error. And so she's not cursed.

[26 : 59] But she is chastened, we'll see that. She does pay a price for her actions. She loses her beloved son, she'll never see him again in the end. And she herself is virtually dropped out of the story from now on.

Don't even get a recording of her death. It's a salutary lesson, I think. Being faithful to the gospel doesn't make our judgment infallible, does it? We can be holding a right course, we can be heading for the right goal, but we can slide into error.

We need to be humble. We always need to be asking God to teach us his way to his goals, not just our way to his goals. Rebecca got what she wanted, but like the Israelites in Psalm 106, God gave them their request, but sent leanness to their souls, as the old King James Version says.

Well, the second half then of this scene introduces Jacob at verse 11. And the striking feature here and in the central scene in verses 18 to 29, surely is deception.

Jacob's deceptive charade here reveals a man whose own pragmatism trumps God's precepts every time. First of all, in the second part of this scene with Rebecca, we see Jacob to be a clear pragmatist, not at all a man of principle.

[28 : 26] His concern with Rebecca's suggestion of deception here isn't that it's wrong, but it's that it might backfire. Verse 12, I might bring a curse on my head and not a blessing, he says.

So lies and deception are fine as long as they work. One writer notes rather wryly that this man here who will later wrestle with God doesn't do any wrestling with his mother and certainly not with his conscience at this point.

And Moses' Israelite readers would know very, very well that not only his lies and false testimony commanded as a sin in the Decalogue, but also that there was a very specific curse pronounced on anybody who led the blind in a wrong way, as exactly Jacob was about to do.

Maybe that's why Jacob mentions the curse here. But it seems only if you're caught. Did Jacob think that God was blind somehow? But we often do, don't we?

We think that God's blind if we do things in secret and nobody else sees. God's not going to see.

Now Jacob could have said to Rebecca, look, mother, this is all wrong.

[29 : 38] I will go to my father and I'll say to him, it's me, Jacob. Father, why haven't you gathered us all to be blessed? Why aren't you going to bless me with the blessing of Abraham according to the oracle that God has said?

Surely, father, you must think again for the sake of God's covenant. And then if that hadn't worked, he could have taken his mother also and the rest of the household to back him up.

That's what Jesus tells his people to do, isn't it, in Matthew 18. But we don't tend to do that either, do we? We don't like to confront people with the truth in that way and so we tend to do the same as Jacob.

We go behind people's backs and we tell untruths and sins and fractured relationships just get worse. That's what happens, isn't it? Well, Jacob prefers, it seems, this kind of pragmatism even if it means lies and deception.

And so in the central scene, verse 18 to 29, we see his panache really in pulling it off. He's not just smooth of skin, is Jacob. He's a pretty smooth operator all around. Bare-faced lies just keep on coming, verse 19.

[30 : 46] I'm Esau, your firstborn, he says. Then he adds blasphemy, misusing God's name to add a pious note to the deception. Oh, the Lord your God has granted me success.

Pious fraud is really the worst kind of fraud of all, isn't it? Well, the tension's rising, isn't it? Because Isaac is very suspicious. You tend to be suspicious, don't you, if you've got a guilty conscience.

And so the voice tells the truth. Isaac's hearing is fine, it sounds very like Jacob, but every one of his other senses lets him down, do you see? Even though he does his very best to interrogate and check out his son's identity.

His eyes fail, his touch fails him, verse 22. His taste fails him when he eats this taste like Esau's stew. And then, verse 27, his smell fails him too.

Finally, Esau's manly bio does the trick, and he guesses who it is. And so he blesses Jacob. The blessings of the land, of plenty and abundance, verse 28.

[31 : 54] The blessing to be a great people, with nations bowing down to them. And the blessing of personal protection and peace at God's hand. Now you see, at heart, what that shows us is that Isaac does also have faith in God's promise.

He believed in God's promise. He believed it was real and it was bountiful. He believed there was real power also in proclaiming the word of promise to accomplish God's blessing in his son's life. He believed the gospel, in other words, and he believed that proclaiming that gospel word had power to change the future. But he thought that he could use the power of God's gospel himself. He thought he could shape God into his view of how God's plan and purpose ought to be accomplished. And that also is a trap we often fall into, isn't it?

In our prayers, when we want to claim for our particular desire or our particular plan the power of God, just because it is our plan, we think God should make it into his plan.

[33 : 02] Or when people greatly misuse the gospel wrongly for motives that are far from godly, for enriching their own ministry bandwagon, as so many of the TV evangelists do, or for promoting their own ego.

And we ask ourselves sometimes, don't we, can people really come to Christ and come to faith in Christ through such terribly wrong and corrupt misuse of the gospel? And the answer, of course, is yes, they can.

And yes, they do. Because as John Calvin rightly says, the infirmity of the minister does not destroy the faithfulness and the power and the efficacy of God's word.

And we know that, don't we? Some of us, I'm sure, came to faith through ministries that now, as we look back on them, we see them as far from adequate and sometimes perhaps greatly in error in certain ways.

Now, there's no excuse, of course, for that kind of behavior. But it is an encouragement, isn't it, to us that God's word is not chained, however perverse the motivation in the hearts of those who proclaim that gospel might be.

[34 : 14] And it's not changed here. God's word, his promise, intends exactly what God intended, despite Isaac's folly and despite Jacob's unprincipled deception.

God saw that Isaac would bless Jacob. Well, then in verse 30, in the scene that follows, we meet Esau.

And here it's a story all about distemper. Esau's distempered complaints reveal that his chief concern is first and foremost his own prospects, not God's plan and purpose.

Esau wails with self-pity in verse 34, an exceedingly great and bitter cry. And he makes out that he is the total innocent in the midst of all of this. He is the wounded party and Jacob alone is the villain of the peace.

But hang on a minute, Esau. Haven't you forgotten that actually you had no interest whatsoever in the blessing of God and in his covenant? You've forgotten that you despised your birthright?

[35 : 25] You've forgotten that you despised God's concern and your parents' concern for a right marriage? And you took not one but two cursed wives? Have you forgotten that you were quite happy to conspire with your father to defy God's clear word in the oracle that the whole family knew was right?

And to steal this covenant blessing that was never intended for you? You, Esau, are just as much a schemer and a deceiver as Jacob is. You see, Esau's grief, it's all about the loss of his material blessings and the earthly gain.

It's nothing whatsoever to do with anything spiritual about the covenant. Esau shows absolutely no repentance, none at all. Instead, in fact, he just confirms himself as a seed of the serpent, not a seed of the promise.

He's just like Cain, isn't he? Verse 40. He hates Jacob. Verse 41. And he wants to kill him. There's absolutely no sign at all of God's grace and mercy at work in Esau's life.

And Esau is not a helpless victim. Esau had chosen his own way over and over again, despising his birthright, wanting to live free from the responsibilities of the covenant, free from the rule of God, free to do what he wants.

[36 : 45] Esau's, insisting that he distance himself from God and his blessings. And so all that's left for Esau is the destiny of the self-chosen godless man.

As Derek Kidner puts it, the freedom to live unblest, verse 39, and untamed, verse 40, by the sword. Casting off the yoke of God's chosen seed as he would do means choosing the way of curse, not choosing the way of blessing.

So that's Esau, the fourth character in the play. Well, what is the outcome of all this sorry story? Well, the final scene from verse 41 through to verse 9 of chapter 28 remind us about the unseen actor.

Indeed, the director who sits above all this sad and sin-stained antics reminds us about the Lord himself. Above all the defiance and the deviousness and the deception and the distemper of his people is God's determination.

What this story tells us is of God's determined commitment to his covenant that means his plan will always triumph, triumph over all human perversity.

[38 : 16] God is sovereign. I will build my church, he says, and the gates of hell and all the sin of human beings, even in my church, will never derail my purposes of grace.

We see so clearly in this final scene God's determination, but also, don't forget, God's discipline. God is not stopped, but neither is he mocked.

So, Rebecca, verse 42, she hears about Esau's intent to kill Jacob. We don't know how, perhaps it was just mother's intuition. Jacob is warned by her, told to flee to safety.

By the way, notice that that's a costly thing for Rebecca. If all she wanted was her own earthly enjoyment of her son, she could have said, she could have said to Jacob, look, no blessing is worth dying for.

Let's do a deal with Jacob. You can sell him back the birthright and smooth this over. But she doesn't do that. She prizes the blessing above absolutely everything. And then Isaac, we're told, is influenced by her to act in verse 46.

[39 : 24] She's a shrewd woman, Rebecca, isn't she? She doesn't mention to Isaac Esau's murderous intent. That might have been too difficult for him to take. She's much more diplomatic. She focuses on the one thing they're actually in agreement on, the wives.

And she appeals, doesn't she, to the needs of the covenant. We can't have Jacob taking one of these wives. And Isaac, it seems, has learned, hasn't he, from his experience.

Back in verse 33, we're told he was deeply shaken when he realized what had happened and what he'd been tricked into doing. He trembled with a very great trembling, is what it says. It's exactly the language, by the way, that Moses readers would know very, very well because it's the language used of them at Sinai when they heard God's voice thundering from the mountain.

They trembled. And God said, by the way, at that time, that's the right reaction to my voice. If only they were like that always, to fear me and keep my commandments, that it might go well with them and their descendants forever.

Well, sometimes it does take a mighty trembling, a mighty shaking of God by his word to bring us back to our senses, doesn't it? When we've been all up the spout spiritually. But now it seems to have worked for Isaac because in verse 1 of chapter 28, he repeats, doesn't he, publicly and very purposefully what he should have done right from the start.

[40 : 48] He both lays on Jacob the responsibilities of the covenant not to have a Canaanite wife and verse 3, he underscores willingly now the blessings of the covenant promised to Abraham and pours them all out publicly upon Jacob.

So Isaac does at last what God had commanded him to do all along. and Rebecca gets the protection for her son that she wants and Jacob receives the blessing that belongs to him despite all the conspiring, the sin, the deception and the folly.

God's will is done just like the conspiring of the Jews and the Gentiles and Herod and Pontius Pilate against God's holy son Jesus could do what? Only what God's hand and God's plan had predestined to take place.

says the apostle in Acts 4.28. God is sovereign and his determination cannot ever, ever be thwarted. Not ever.

Not by the ferocity of his enemies nor by the folly and the foolishness of his own people. but nor can his discipline be avoided because though God is sovereign we also are responsible, aren't we, for our actions and sin does matter even among God's people especially among God's people and so sin does have consequences always and appeal to God's sovereignty can never ever be an excuse for our sins can it?

[42 : 36] And there are consequences to be borne by all the parties here. Isaac and Rebecca's role in the story is now completely eclipsed. We never hear of Rebecca again her death isn't even mentioned.

Isaac, well he lives on for another 80 years but we hear nothing about it except for his death and they both lose the son of the covenant blessing, Jacob.

They lose him into exile. Their whole family is broken up forever. Another painful separation for the sake of the covenant just like there was with Abraham back in chapter 25 but here because of their own sin it's the chosen seed who has to go away into exile for the sake of God's covenant purpose. And doesn't that have ominous echoes for the later history of God's people? Sin has consequences and here as so often there is a chastening from God for his people of faith.

They do love and honor his covenant gospel but they can't avoid God's covenant discipline either. God cannot ignore, can he, the sins of his saints.

[43 : 52] But notice also that as well as a chastening for the godly who sin there is also a confirming isn't there of the curse upon those who at heart are not truly God's covenant people. Esau who despises his birthright who shows contempt for the covenant again and again because his heart is totally out of touch with God's covenant purposes.

Look at verse six, you see Esau only now it seems seems to get a grip of the fact that his wives are a problem and he senses that that's got something to do with his own misfortune so he thinks to himself all right you holy huddle, all right you pompous holy bunch, I'll show you that I can be just as religious as you can, I'll get a wife who'll please you, I'll get a wife from another branch of your own family.

And yet poor Esau he's so out of touch with God's revelation that he just gets a cursed wife of a different kind, a descendant of Ishmael the half brother of Isaac through Hagar whom God had already told Abraham to send away, why?

Because they too would be sworn enemies of God's covenant forever. So all Esau does here as well as worsening his polygamy is to succeed in uniting two separate lines of enemy seed as it were against God's covenant people.

Read Psalm 83 later on you'll see how it speaks of enemies of Israel conspiring against his people. Who are they? The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites.

[45 : 32] Just like another elder brother in the parable that Jesus told, he only compounds his total misunderstanding of God's covenant promise by refusing to repent as Isaac had done.

Refusing to submit to God's revealed way of grace which was open to him just as it was open to everybody else. If only he too would like his father bless at last his brother Jacob and look to God's covenant grace, God's way through the person he'd appointed.

But he wouldn't do that. He'd rather kill him than do that. rebirth confirms himself as choosing to be a hostile seed of the serpent, not a humble seed of the promise.

And he joins himself with another whole house of hostile seed by marrying into this enemies of the covenant people. It's the same thing isn't it as we see in the gospels after Jesus is betrayed by not one but by two of his disciples, betrayed by Judas in his wickedness but also betrayed, remember, by Peter in his weakness denying the Lord.

What do we read? Peter went out and wept bitterly. Tears of repentance. Just like Isaac here was committed in the end to real repentance, to acting in faith in response to God by blessing Jacob and saying, all right, Lord, I'll do it your way.

[47 : 11] Peter went out and wept bitterly but Judas, Judas went out and hung himself because he would rather die than repent, rather die than submit to God's mercy through his chosen seed, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that's Esau, you see, there's remorse, there's regret, there's loss, but as Hebrews chapter 12 tells us, there was no repentance, so he was rejected.

See, no one can avoid the consequences of sin, and where there's no repentance, there can't be any forgiveness, only curse. But where there is a humble and a penitent submission to God's word

and a returning to his ways, there is real hope, there is real blessing, even though there may need to be real chastening, and that is always so for the sons and daughters that God loves.

And we'll see that chastening as it shapes Jacob's life in the chapters that are to come. As we close, let me just focus on the real hope that this chapter brings to us as the church today, who are all too aware, aren't we, of our own folly, our own dysfunction, our own failings, our own sinfulness. First of all, we can have hope because God works through his people even when they have mixed motives. That doesn't excuse sin, of course it not, indeed it warns us that all sin has consequences, but to all of us who know that our own hearts are sinful, and that we have mixed motives in our heart, it gives us hope, doesn't it?

[48 : 57] Even wrong and mixed motives God can use, and he does use, where at heart there really is real trust and belief in his gospel of grace and in his power to bless.

And that should encourage us, shouldn't it? Because we know that our own hearts are never free from mixed motives. And it should encourage us when we know and suspect that other people's hearts are not free from mixed motives either, and especially when those motives seem to be hurtful to us.

Paul knew, didn't he, that some preach Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely, thinking to inflict hurt on him in his imprisonment. But he could say, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Well, we need to do that too, don't we? There are brethren that perhaps we think may be afflicting us in our present difficulties in these days. Of course, many, like in Paul's time, are full of love, knowing that our straits are for the defense of the gospel.

But some may actively be hurting us and harming us by their words. But we're to just leave all of that, aren't we, in the hands of a sovereign God. We're not to despise, we're to rejoice that whatever the motive, if Christ is proclaimed, Christ is proclaimed.

[50 : 17] And we're to rejoice that God's power can be at work through his gospel, even when motives are mixed, our own mixed motives or other people's mixed motives, so we can have hope.

Second, it gives us hope because it tells us that even our sin can't ever derail God's plan and his purpose for our lives.

And sometimes indeed God does bless us, doesn't he, by exposing our folly, just as Isaac was jolted back into line by God's words so that he didn't miss his calling in life to pass on that blessing to his son.

It was painful for Isaac, wasn't it, to tremble with a violent trembling. It was powerful. And so if God sometimes has to shock you and shake you and chasten you, perhaps through a faithful friend or perhaps just through a word from scripture hitting home and challenging you in your life, don't resent it.

It's God's grace, it's his commitment to your life that he's showing by doing that. And finally, this passage surely, surely gives us hope because it points us to God's determined commitment to his plan of salvation, because it points us to the certainty of his covenant grace to us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[51 : 46] If ever a story in the Bible showed us how desperately, even God's chosen family of faith, how desperately they needed a savior, is not this it?

God's but that promise of covenant blessing was certain, and the seed of God's promise was preserved despite all the sin and the folly and the foolishness and everything, all down the years, until the savior himself did at last come, the true brother who didn't grasp, but who willingly gave his eternal blessing to everyone who would name him as savior, who would buy the knee to him as covenant lord and blessing of his people.

Aren't you glad? Aren't you glad that his future and his survival and his blessing doesn't depend on us with all our uncertainty, with all our sins, with all our mixed motives?

Aren't you glad that all our future depends wholly on him and on the certainty of the covenant grace that is ours through our Lord Jesus Christ?

I'm very, very glad, and I'm sure you are also. Let's pray. Lord, how painful it is for us to see ourselves in the mirror of scripture as the sin and the folly, the deception, the willful defiance of your word that we see in this story is indeed all there in our own hearts.

[53 : 45] grace. But how we thank you, Lord, that our future depends not upon us or our strength, but upon you and your great promise and in the certainty of our risen Lord Jesus Christ.

So, in this Easter season, we pray, would you fill our hearts and minds afresh with the joy of the certainty of we who have a risen Savior, that we might point others also to his grace and rejoice with them in a Savior who stooped so low that we might be lifted so high.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.