

The Certainty of the Covenant

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] And we're now going to turn to our Bible reading. Do grab a Bible. If you don't have one, follow along. Margo or Hazel would love to pass you one. I've got some of the sides and the back.

But we're going to be reading now from Genesis chapter 26. Willie Phillip, our senior minister, will be preaching to us this evening.

And we're going to be reading from Genesis chapter 26, verse 34, through to chapter 28, verse 9. We're picking up here at the end of chapter 26. As we'll see, this section is bracketed with Esau's wives. Here from verse 34 and then in chapter 28.

So Genesis chapter 26, verse 34. When Esau was 40 years old, he took Judith, the daughter of Beri, the Hittite, to be his wife, and Basimath, the daughter of Elon, the Hittite.

[1 : 06] And he made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah. When Isaac was old and his eyes were dimmed that he could not see, he called Esau, his older son, and said to him, My son.

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 out to the fields and hunt game for me, and prepare for me delicious food, such as I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat, that 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 young good goats, so that I may prepare from 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.

[2 : 26] 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 shall be seen to be mocking him, and bring a curse upon myself, and not a blessing.

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 he 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 my game, that your soul may bless me.

[3 : 38] But Isaac said to his son, How is it that you have found 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. 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 did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands. So he blessed him. He said, Are you really my son Esau? He answered, I am.

Then he said, Bring it near to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you. So he brought it near to him, and he ate, and he brought him wine, and he drank.

Then his father Isaac said to him, Come near and kiss me, my son. So he came near and kissed him. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed.

[4 : 50] May God give you the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of green and wine. Let people serve you and nations bow down to you. Be Lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you.

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. He said to his father, Let my father arise and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me. His 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 all 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 said to his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father.

[6 : 06] But he said, Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing. Esau said, Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has cheated me these two times.

He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing. Then 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. Then 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.

[7 : 24] 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.

So she sent and called Jacob, her younger 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 have done to him.

Then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereft of you both in one day? Then Rebekah said to Isaac, I lose 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? Then 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 Bethuel, 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.

[8 : 52] 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 Bethuel, the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.

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. This is God's word and we'll return to it shortly. We'll do open your Bibles at Genesis 27.

If God's purposes for this world depended on us, on his church, then the truth is the world has very little hope. But mercifully, God's future does not lie in the hands of his church.

[10:24] It is exactly the other way around. The church's future and the world's blessing through the promise that the church carries, the gospel of Jesus Christ, is entirely in God's hands and under God's power.

Now Moses, the writer of Genesis, knew that. That's why he wrote Genesis in the next four books of the Bible, to remind his people of it.

He was a complete realist about them. Remember, he warned them right at the very end of his life that they would continue in their rebellious ways, that they would incur God's judgment and his wrath.

And yet, at the same time, he could pronounce on them his certain blessing, even on such a wayward people, because salvation lies solely, solely in the covenant grace of God.

What if some of them were unfaithful? Asked the Apostle Paul. Does their unfaithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means. No. God's determined commitment to what he has promised means that his plan and his purpose will triumph over all human failing, all perversity, always.

[11:34] His covenant is utterly certain. I will build my church, said the Lord Jesus. Not even the gates of hell shall prevail against it.

And it's that wonderful truth that this story in Genesis chapter 27 underlines for us so very clearly. Even the utter dysfunction within the covenant family cannot thwart God's determination to bring about everything he has promised with utterly effortless precision.

Look at the heading to chapter 27 in our ESV Bible. Three words. Isaac blesses Jacob. And that is the message. of this chapter.

In the midst of all the complicated shenanigans that unfolds, these three words tell us that what God had commanded in the oracle before even the twin's birth, that it will come to pass.

The elder will serve the younger and Jacob will receive the blessing of the covenant and he will carry its future on and not even an errant patriarch, not even the devil himself can stop that.

[12:48] God is sovereign. His covenant is certain. And yet, of course, sin does also have consequences.

And this story carries a very real warning to God's people to his church. But it's also a message of great hope because it's not just a moral tale here in our Bibles about the consequences of deception and lies and favoritism in a family and so on.

No, much more than that, it is a wonderful reminder that God's good and perfect will shall be done even in a fallen world, even through a very faulty church.

As William Stowe put it, reminds it, despite his worst efforts, the devil, he says, outwits himself in the sphere of his own disintegrating bedlam. In other words, God uses even the worst evil in the human heart to bring about his purposes of ultimate grace and mercy.

Now let's look at this story. Let's see what it teaches us about the absolute certainty of God's covenant gospel. You'll see, as Josh said, that the whole narrative is set between these two brackets at the end of verse 26 and then the little paragraph verses 6 to 9 of chapter 28.

[14:09] Two paragraphs that tell us about Esau's marriages. Marriages, as we'll see, to enemies of the covenant people. Marriages that deeply grieved his parents.

And in between those two brackets, there are five scenes really that unfold. Each one focuses on a dialogue between the two main characters in that scene. And each one is dominated by the issue of the blessing.

The blessing. It's mentioned 28 times. In this narrative. And the centerpiece is in verses 18 to 29 where Isaac blesses Jacob and the oracle is fulfilled.

But none of the actors in the drama can claim any credit at all. Even though in the end they all do exactly what is needed to achieve God's intent.

Now let's look at each scene as the story presents them to us. First of all, in verses 1 to 5, Isaac is the main focus. And the overriding picture here I think is one of defiance.

[15:16] Isaac's defiant challenge to God as he seeks to bless Esau despite God's clear command and despite Esau's clear contempt for the covenant. And it reveals that Isaac's focus is clearly much more on his own pleasure than on God's promise.

We know doubt about Isaac's deliberate defiance of God here. First of all, he surely knows, doesn't he, the oracle that God spoke before the twin's birth that the blessing of Abraham would be not

through the older but through the younger son.

And secondly, he surely also knew all about Esau's contempt for his birthright. He knew that Esau despised it.

And just in case we don't quite grasp that, the two verses that immediately precede these at the end of chapter 26 there, they tell us about God's, about Esau's flagrant disregard for all God's covenant concern about the purity of the covenant family.

Remember all the insistence of Abraham that Isaac would not, not have a wife ever from among the cursed people of the Canaanites. And what does Esau do here?

[16:32] Takes not just one but two wives from the cursed Canaanites. Caused his parents deep bitterness of spirit, anguish, heartache.

So Isaac must have known that he was now on a headline clash with God. I wonder if that's why he seems so clandestine.

Do you notice he talks to Esau alone, talks to him about setting up this private blessing in his tent instead of a public ceremony in front of all the family which is what would normally happen. That's what happens if you read on at the end of Genesis 49 about Jacob blessing all of his sons in front of everybody.

But no, this is all private and clandestine. Why? Why is he doing this despite all his faithfulness in previous years?

Again, William Still, it's so sad, he says, when the Lord's servants live long enough to undo the work of their glorious years. What's driving Isaac?

[17:35] Well, it seems that to use Paul's phrase to the Philippians, his God is his stomach. Key words all through this chapter about food, aren't they?

Eight times we're told about game, six times, delicious food that Isaac loves. There was Trail back in chapter 25, do you remember, where Isaac, we're told, loved Esau because Esau ate of his game.

And as Derek Kidner says, it seems his palate had long since guided his heart. Gourmet appetites have displaced gospel appetites.

His pleasure in his palate had clearly overtaken his pleasure in God's promise. And it's a sad picture, isn't it? But it's not an uncommon one. Again, William Still, I think, writes with great realism and he says, it's a reminder that the devil does not easily let go and may be especially malevolent when the worn-out body is too feeble to resist.

The devil does not easily let go, does he? And we're all very frail. We're all dust, aren't we? Some of you youngsters here will think, I think, because I used to think this, that temptations and battles in the Christian life will get much easier when you turn 30 or even as old as 40.

[19:02] Never mind 50 or 60 or 80 or 90. Well, think again. Not so. Here, Isaac allows his earthly appetites to cloud his judgment about the most important matter for any man and for any father.

And that is his family's future in God's covenant purpose. He knows God's word. He knows Esau's disregard for his birthright, for the responsibilities of covenant life.

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

Yes, he was grieved very greatly at Esau's disregard for God's commands about marriage, about these unholy partnerships that he had. And yet he pretends somehow now, doesn't he, that that's not really that important.

And he thinks that he can just bless it all the same instead of calling his son to repent. But the church of God can't just bless what God calls sin, can it?

[20:19] God won't be used like that. And yet Isaac thinks he can. He's defiant in his challenge to God. Well, the next scene in verses 5 to 17 shows us Rebecca's part in all of this.

And this is all about deviousness. Rebecca's devious circumvention of her husband betrays a focus that however well-intentioned, however covenant-honoring it is, she has more trust in her own planning than in God's providence and in God's power.

The verse 5 tells us that Rebecca was listening in when Isaac spoke to Esau. It's hardly a sign of a very harmonious marriage, is it? Can't help wondering whether there was a great deal of lasting damage by that episode that we looked at last week in chapter 26.

Remember when Isaac put his wife so at risk in order to save his own skin. Rebecca does trust God's oracle. You see, she knows how significant this blessing is.

Look at verse 7. It's before the Lord. That is, this is a word of promise. And she knows that the blessing is uttered absolutely from God. She trusts that there's power in this word to transmit God's blessing.

[21 : 40] She knows that there's nothing more important in life for her family's future than that this happens. And yet her husband is failing in his God-given duty.

And that's very hard, isn't it? It's very hard when a more spiritually attuned wife doesn't have a strong Christian husband, doesn't have a husband who's giving the lead in the home that there should be.

That can be very agonizing, difficult for a godly woman. Peter shows us the right way, doesn't he? Because in 1 Peter 3 he says, such a wife is to win over her husband by respect and by her pure conduct.

But you see, here's the thing, often a strong woman, and remember, Rebecca was a very strong woman. She was the ten camel woman, remember. An EPW, an extremely powerful woman. And often, a strong woman like that tries to channel her frustrations into manipulating her husband and even controlling her whole family.

[22 : 46] And that really has a happy ending. Rebecca, you see, this powerful woman, she takes this root of devious circumvention of her husband because he's failing in his spiritual duties and he is.

Again, we have to be careful here before we slam poor Rebecca. It was very hard for her. She had real faith. Her spiritual judgment on this was actually sound. Her motivation in all of this was right. But you see, it's possible, isn't it, to have all the right instincts in pursuing a gospel cause and yet still go about it in a wrong-headed way, in a misguided way.

Once again, I think John Calvin gets the balance right here. Certainly, he says, Rebecca's strategy is at fault. She shouldn't have deceived her husband and yet, clearly, he says, her action did flow from faith.

But as is so often true of us as God's people, her faith, he says, is enveloped in various clouds of ignorance and error.

[23 : 57] Well, isn't that often true of us? He says, while they hold a right cause and course and are tending towards the goal, yet, occasionally, they slide.

Well, that's true of all of us, isn't it? Sometimes, very often. Well, that's Rebecca, you see, she's faithful, but she's flawed.

She's too focused on her own planning, on her own controlling, but not enough on God's power. And yet, she's sure that God's promise and its transmission of the blessing is the most important thing for her family's future.

And she's even willing, says verse 13, even willing for herself to be cursed for Jacob's sake. Let your curse fall on me. Again, a lot of the commentators are quick to slam Rebecca for saying that sort of thing there, but I can't help thinking about Paul's words, almost identical, aren't they, in Romans 9, verse 9, where he says, I'm willing to be cursed if only my kith and kin could receive the blessing of God's promised mercy.

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

[25 : 17] Although she is chastened, because as we'll see, she does pay a price for her actions. She's going to lose her beloved son. Soon she'll never see him again for the rest of her life. And actually, she herself disappears completely from the story after this chapter.

Not even her death is recorded, actually. And it's a satisfactory lesson, isn't it? Because being faithful to the gospel, it doesn't make our judgment infallible.

And we can be holding that right course. We can be tending towards the true goal and yet sometimes slide into an awful mess. We need to be humble, don't we?

We need to be teachable and let God teach us His way to His goals. Rebecca got what she wanted. But as Psalm 106 that we sang says of the Israelites, God gave them their request but sent leanness to their souls.

The second half of this scene involves Jacob from verse 11 onwards. And again, the striking feature here and in the central section from verses 18 to 29, the striking thing is the deception.

[26 : 29] Jacob's deceptive charade reveals a man whose own pragmatism trumps God's precepts every time it seems. Firstly, in the second part of the scene with Rebecca, we see Jacob to be a

sheer pragmatist.

He's not a man of principle at all. His concern with Rebecca's suggestion here of deception isn't that it's wrong. His concern is that it might backfire.

Verse 12, I may bring a curse on my head, not a blessing. In other words, lies and deception are fine as long as they work. You make a great politician. One writer notes wryly that this man who will later wrestle with God doesn't do much wrestling here at all, neither with his mother nor with his conscience.

And Moses' readers, remember, who first read this, they would know very well that bearing false witness like this is absolutely forbidden in the Decalogue and the Ten Commandments. They also know that there's a very specific curse on somebody who misleads a blind man.

That's why Jacob is fearful here in verse 12. But of course, only if you're caught. Do they really think that God is blind? But again, a lot of us often act like that, don't we?

[27 : 47] We think somehow God will be blind to what we're doing. Jacob could have said to his mother, couldn't he? He could have said, no, no, mother. I'll go to my father and challenge him.

I'll say to him, it's me, Jacob. Why haven't you called me to bless me according to God's word, according to the oracle? Think again. Please, bless me and honor God.

And if that hadn't worked, he could have then taken others with him, couldn't he? That's the way Jesus tells his people to do these things in Matthew chapter 18. But then again, we often ignore Jesus too, don't we?

We often don't like to confront people and talk to them head on. We go behind people's backs and we tell untruths and that often leads to just even more problems.

And Jacob prefers this way of pragmatism, even if it involves lies, even if it involves deception. And in the central scene, if you look from verse 18 to 29, we see his extraordinary panache in pulling it off.

[28 : 50] He's not just smooth of skin, he's a smooth operator all round. The barefaced lies just keep coming, don't they? Verse 19, I'm Esau, your firstborn. And then he adds blasphemy, misusing God's name to add a pious note to his deception.

Oh, the Lord, your God, granted me success. Pious frauds are the worst kind of frauds, aren't they? And the tension's high because Isaac is suspicious.

You usually are, aren't you, when you've got a bit of a guilty conscience? And the voice tells the truth. Isaac's hearing is fine, but all of his other senses, do you note, they let him down.

Even though he does his very, very best to try and check the identity of this man. His eyes fail him. His touch fails him, verse 22. Verse 25, his taste fails him when he eats.

And even in verse 27, even his smell fools him. Esau's manly BO is the final thing that does the trick. And so, verse 28, he blesses Jacob, a blessing of the land, plenty and abundance.

[29 : 59] And for a great people, verse 29, blessed among the nations, and God's personal presence and protection and peace.

You see, at heart, you notice, Isaac did have faith in God's promise. He's repeating the gospel promise given to Abraham. He believed that it was real. He believed that it was bountiful. He believed there was real power in proclamation of that word of promise to accomplish God's purpose for the future. He believed in the gospel. He believed the gospel had power to change the future.

But you see, he thought that he could use the gospel. He thought he could shape God into his view of how that plan and purpose should be accomplished.

And again, that's a trap that we can easily fall into. Maybe in our prayers when we want to claim for our plan that we've concocted, we want to claim the power of God just because it's our plan and because it seems such a good plan to us, then God, you must make it your plan.

[31 : 13] We do that, don't we? Or worse, when people use the gospel very wrongly for motives that are very far from godly, for enriching themselves in their own ministry.

We see that, don't we, with some of the TV evangelists and so on? Or just to burnish their own ego? That's always a great temptation. Can people really come to faith, real faith in Jesus Christ through such wrong, through such corrupt uses of the gospel?

Well, yes, they can. And 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.

God's word here from Isaac was powerful. even though he was all wrong about it. And some of us may well have come to faith through ministries that we can now see are very inadequate or maybe even very corrupt.

That's no excuse, of course. Absolutely not. But it is an encouragement, isn't it, that God's word is not chained by our mess or our misuse. And it wasn't chained here.

[32 : 29] It accomplished what God intended despite Isaac's folly, despite Jacob's unprincipled deception. But look at verse 30 because the focus now moves to Esau.

And in this scene that follows, well, it's all about distemper. Esau's distempered complaints reveal that his chief concern is first of all his own prospect.

It's not for God's plan and God's purpose. He wails with self-pity in verse 34, an exceedingly great and bitter cry. He makes out that he's totally innocent.

He's a victim. He's the wounded party. Jacob is the arch villain in all of this. But hang on a minute. Have you forgotten Esau? Have you forgotten that absolutely no interest was in your mind at all for the blessing of God or his covenant?

You despised your birthright. Do you remember? You despised God's concern and your parents' concern for a right marriage. You took not just one but two cursed wives.

[33 : 35] And don't forget you colluded with your father right now trying to defy God's clear command that this blessing should go to your brother, not to you. You're just as much a skeever, just as much a deceiver as Jacob.

And Esau's grief you see is all about the loss of material blessings and earthly gain. It's nothing to do with spiritual concerns.

He shows no repentance, none at all. Instead he just confirms himself as the true seed not of promise but of the serpent. He's just like Cain, isn't he? Look at verse 41. He hates his brother and he wants to kill him.

There's absolutely no sign in this man's heart of grace or mercy. Esau is not a helpless victim. Esau chose his own way over and over again. He despised his birthright. He wanted to live totally free from the responsibilities of God's covenant, free from the rule of this God.

[34 : 43] And to demand that, you see, is to insist that God will distance himself from you and distance his blessings with him.

And so all that is left for Esau is the destiny of the self-chosen godless man, as Derek Kidna puts it, the freedom to live unblessed, verse 39, and untamed, verse 40.

Casting off the yoke of God's chosen seed, you see, means choosing the way of curse and not the way of blessing. Well, what's the outcome of all this sorry story?

The final scene from verse 42 through to verse 9 of chapter 20 reminds us about the unseen actor, indeed the director of this old drama.

who is sitting above all this sad and sin-stained mess. The Lord himself. Above all the defiance and the deviousness and the deception and the distemper of his people is God's determination.

[36 : 00] What this story tells us is that God's determined commitment to his covenant means God's plan will trump all human perversity.

Always. God is sovereign. I will build my church and neither the gates of hell nor the guilt of human beings can ever derail God's sovereign purposes of grace.

And that's what these final scenes underline for us. God's determination but also also his discipline. God has not stopped. Verse 42 Rebecca hears what we're told of Verse 41 Esau had just said to himself about killing Jacob.

We're not told how she heard. Maybe she could just sense it. And Jacob is warned by her and he's told to flee to safety. And notice that is a costly thing for Rebecca even though she thinks it's just going to be for a short time Verse 44 a while.

She could have said couldn't she to Jacob look we made a mistake this blessing is not worth dying for. Just do a deal with Esau. Give him back his birthright and let's be at peace.

[37 : 13] She doesn't do that because she prizes the blessing above all things for what it is. And then Isaac you see in Verse 46 is influenced by her to act.

She's a shrewd woman. You see she doesn't mention to Isaac Esau's murderous intent. She's much more diplomatic than that. She focuses on the things that they can agree on. And that is the risk of Jacob getting pagan wives like Esau has done.

So she appeals to the needs of the covenant. And happily it seems Isaac has actually learned from his experience. It seems Isaac is genuinely repentant.

Look back at Verse 33 tells us that Isaac had been deeply shaken hadn't he when he realized that he'd been tricked. He trembled with a very great trembling. That is exactly the words used of Moses' first readers, the people of Israel, when they trembled, when they heard the voice of God thundering to them at Sinai.

So they knew what this meant. They knew Isaac has been convicted of his sin just as we were convicted. And that's the right reaction, isn't it, to God's word. Do you remember in Deuteronomy chapter 5 at Sinai, God says, oh, that my people would have a mind as this always, to fear me and keep all my commandments, that it might go well with them and their descendants forever.

[38 : 36] And that was Isaac's reaction here. And sometimes it does take a great jolt from God's hand to shake us back to reality when we've been defiant and sinning against them.

And that's what happened for Isaac. So now, look at chapter 28, verse 1. Now, he repeats publicly and purposefully what he should have done right at the start. He both lays on Jacob the responsibilities of his covenant calling, as Abraham had done for him, not a Canaanite wife.

And verse 3, now he underscores willingly the blessings of the covenant upon him. He proclaims him as the true heir, the seed of promise through whom the blessing of Abraham would continue both to bless this family and ultimately to bless the whole world.

So Isaac does now what God commanded him to do. Rebekah gets the protection for her son that she desires, and Jacob, he receives the blessing that was always due to him, despite all of their sin and conspiring and deception and folly.

Does that remember all the conspiracy of Herod and Pontius Pilate and the Gentiles and the Jews against Jesus could only do, says Acts 4, verse 28, whatever God's hand and God's plan had predestined to take place.

[40 : 03] God is sovereign. And his determination cannot ever be thwarted, either by the ferocity of his enemies or by the folly of his own people.

But nor can his discipline be avoided because though God is sovereign, he makes us responsible for our actions.

And sin does matter always among God's people, and it does have consequences. An appeal to God's sovereignty is never, ever an excuse for our sinfulness.

And there are consequences to be borne here by all the parties. Isaac and Rebekah's role in God's story, well, it's now largely eclipsed. Even though they live on a very long time, Rebekah, as I said, is never mentioned again.

Even her death is not recorded. Isaac lives for many, many years, another 80 years or so, but hardly a mention, without any significance. And they both lose their son Jacob, who now goes off into exile for many, many years.

[41 : 11] Their family is broken up forever. It's another painful separation, isn't it, for the sake of the covenant, just like Abraham had in his family back in chapter 25.

But here, it's because of their sin that the chosen seed himself is the one sent into exile. Isn't that an eerie echo of later history?

Sin has consequences. And here, as so often, there is a chastening from God on his people of faith. They do love and honor his covenant gospel, but they can't avoid God's discipline.

And God doesn't ignore the sins of his saints. And that's a warning to us. But notice also that as well as a chastening for the godly who sin, there's also also a terrible confirming of the curse upon those who are not truly of the covenant people at heart.

Esau, who despises his birthright, who shows contempt, he just proves here how totally out of touch his heart really is with the heartbeat of God's promise.

[42 : 29] Look at chapter 28, verse 6. He shows us that Esau is only now coming to see, it seems, that his choice in wives was a problem.

He senses that it's got something to do with his own misfortune, so he now thinks, okay, I'll show you, I can be just as religious as you, Lord, I'll get the kind of wife that will please you from another branch of our family.

Succeed in uniting two lines of enemy seed. Read Psalm 83 later on, you'll see how it speaks about the enemies of Israel conspiring against God's covenant.

Who are these enemies? Esau's people, the tents of Edom, Esau's people, and the Ishmaelites. Just like another elder brother, do you remember, in the parable that Jesus told.

He only compounds his total misunderstanding, doesn't he, of God's covenant promise by refusing to repent and join the joy with his younger brother. He didn't do what Isaac did and submit at last to God's way of grace, which was open to him and to everyone.

[43 : 37] If only Esau would do that and bless his brother Jacob and look to God's covenant blessing God's way, not demanding it his way.

But no, he didn't do that. Rather, he would kill him and submit. And he both confirms himself as choosing to be a hostile seed of the serpent and not the humble seed of the promise.

And he goes and joins himself to even more seed of the serpent by marrying more sworn enemies of God's covenant. It's the same contrast, isn't it, that we see in the Gospels after, do you remember, Jesus was betrayed both by Judas' wickedness but also by Peter's weakness in denying him.

Do you remember we're told Peter, Peter was penitent, he went out and wept bitterly, real tears of repentance, just like Isaac here. Penitent, acting now in faith to bless Jacob.

But it was very different for Judas, wasn't it? Judas went out and hung himself. He would rather die than repent, rather die than submit to God's way of mercy through his one chosen seed.

[45 : 03] And that's Esau. It's full of remorse, full of regret at his loss. But as Hebrews 12 tells us, no repentance. And so he was rejected.

None can avoid, you see, the consequences of sin. And where there's no repentance, there can be no forgiveness and they curse. But where there is a humble and a penitent submission to God's word and a returning to his way, well then there is real hope and real blessing, even though there may be needs for a real chastening, as there always is for those whom God loves.

And we'll see that chastening, the love of God chastening Jacob's life all throughout the story that follows. But as we close, let's just focus on the real hope that this chapter does bring to us as the church today, because we're all too aware, aren't we, of the dysfunction in the church of Jesus Christ, in our own lives, in our own family, in our own follies.

But there's hope. First, we can have hope because God works through his people even when they have mixed motives. It doesn't excuse sin. In fact, as we've seen this, warns us very clearly that all sin has consequences, but to all of us who know the sin and the mixed motives of our own heart, it does give us hope.

Even wrong and mixed motives God can use and God does use where there is a heart that has true faith in the gospel and trusts us in God's power to bless.

[46 : 44] And that should encourage us, shouldn't it, when we know, as we will often know that our motives have been mixed. And when we suspect that other people's motives are mixed, especially when their actions seem to hurt us.

Paul knew, didn't he, the apostle, when he was imprisoned that some preached Christ out of rivalry. They weren't doing it sincerely. They wanted to bring shame on him in his imprisonment. And yet he could say, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed.

And in that I rejoice. rejoice. And we need to do that too. Rejoice that God's work is, God's power is at work in his gospel, even when motives are mixed, whether it's our own or in others.

Secondly, it gives us hope because it tells us that even our own sin cannot derail God's plan and purpose for our lives. Sometimes God blesses us by exposing our folly, just as Isaac was jolted back into line in this situation, so that he didn't miss his calling in life, which was to pass on that blessing to his family.

It was very painful for that to happen to him, but it proved very powerful for the history of the world, no less. So if God should sometimes shock you and chasten you, maybe through a faithful friend or maybe the word of scripture that's hitting home with power and making you tremble, that God should shock you like that.

[48 : 23] Don't resent it. Thank God for his grace. Thank God for his commitment to his gospel covenant in your life. But finally, this passage gives us hope because it points us to God's determined commitment to his plan of salvation and to the absolute certainty of his covenant of redemption in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If ever a story showed how desperately God's own people, his family, his church, need a savior from sin, then this is it. But that promise of his covenant was certain.

The seed was preserved. And despite all the sin, all the folly, all the faithlessness of his people, all down the years, the savior did come, didn't he?

Our Lord Jesus Christ. The true brother who didn't grasp and didn't deceive but willingly gave all his blessing and gave it to every single one who would name him as the way of blessing, the promise seed, the savior.

And by the need of him as the covenant Lord and as the only name under heaven by which that blessing might come. Aren't you glad that the future and the survival of God's blessing and his gospel doesn't depend on us, on you and on me, on the church of Jesus Christ with all our uncertainty, with all our sin?

[50 : 04] Aren't you glad that all of our future under God's hand depends not on us but wholly on him and on the certainty, the certainty of his covenant grace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is hope because God's covenant is certain. Amen. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we see ourselves and our own hearts, in all the mess and the folly, in all the willful disobedience, in all the arrogance, all the foolishness of this story, we are driven to our knees, Lord, perhaps with a great and terrible trembling at times.

grace. But how we thank you that your grace is certain. How we thank you that in Christ alone, all our hope is truly found.

So help us, we pray, to bow the knee to him today and every day, to joyfully name him as our Savior, as our Lord, as our sovereign.

Amen.