

Series: "Genesis...The Beginnings Continued"

Sermon: "Ongoing Life in a Family of Faith and Failure"

Text: Genesis 27:41-28:9

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- I was working on understanding the passage in *Genesis* we have for today early one morning. My eyes were barely open. My coffee cup was still nearly full and still hot. In other words, I was not yet quite wide-awake.
- In my sleepy state I decided I needed to look at the identity of the Hittite people who appear in the narrative again in these verses. Were they equivalent to the Canaanites? A parallel to them? Who were they. They were mentioned back in Genesis 15:16-20 when the LORD cut the covenant with Abraham with smoke and fire passing between the parts of the animals Abraham had placed out before falling into a deep sleep.
- In chapter 15 the Hittites were listed as a people whose land would be given to Abraham's offspring once the sins of the Amorites reached God's measure of too much to put up with any longer and resulted in judgment from God. The Hittites were a people that would be judged by God along with or seen as part of the Canaanites. The Hittites were a people without faith in God and who were in opposition to God's plan.
- Actually, to be honest, I didn't re-discover all of this while I was still half-asleep. I did that later after waking up.
- What happened was in my sleepiness I accidentally turned to Exodus 15 instead of Genesis 15 and was reading verses 15-20 there. They also happen to be about the Canaanites and the Hittites and all the peoples like them who oppose God's plan, God's promises and God's people.
- These Exodus verses are part of the song of Moses and Miriam sung in praise after the exiting Israelites crossed the Red Sea and watched the LORD defeat the mighty Egyptian army for them.

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- This song is one of a few strategic pieces of poetic writing that Moses uses when he stitches together the parts of the Pentateuch to produce a single unified message about God and his works in the earth.
- That message is that God graciously works by faith to accomplish a glorious plan of redemption throughout human history after the Fall.

The first part of the song in Exodus speaks to the current context and the conquering of Israel's enemies in that day and time. But listen to the soaring words of the second part of the song and see if you can't sense where they are pointing. **Exodus 15:13–18 (NIV84)**

***13 "In your unfailing love you will lead  
the people you have redeemed.***

***In your strength you will guide them  
to your holy dwelling.***

***14 The nations will hear and tremble;  
anguish will grip the people of Philistia.***

***15 The chiefs of Edom will be terrified,  
the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling,  
the people of Canaan will melt away;***

***16 terror and dread will fall upon them.***

***By the power of your arm  
they will be as still as a stone—  
until your people pass by, O LORD,  
until the people you bought pass by.***

***17 You will bring them in and plant them  
on the mountain of your inheritance—  
the place, O LORD, you made for your dwelling,  
the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established.***

***18 The LORD will reign for ever and ever."***

- At this point of the song we could sing part of the song the "Hallelujah Chorus" we know that is about The LORD Jesus

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Christ..."*King of Kings and Lord of Lords forever and ever Hallelujah! Hallelujah!*"

- In Exodus 15, Moses is writing of the plan of God that extends beyond Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, beyond Israel of the OT—extends to the day when a baby is born from the line of Abraham—the tribe of Judah—and then extends beyond the earthly life and death of that baby to everlasting resurrection life and to a return of the rule and reign of God over the earth and all of the tribes and kindred and nations—all of humanity returned to their created purpose of imaging God—of bringing glory to his name.
- And we who have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ are in that plan along the way—just as was Israel—just as were Isaac, Rebekah and their sons Jacob and Esau.
- By grace through faith, we, *part of the family of faith*, are invited, not just (as some say) to "go to heaven when we die," but we are invited into something this big—this eternal—this divine—that is just as absolutely certain today as it was when Moses and Miriam sung about it on the banks of the Red Sea.
- But then, sometimes, it seems a little less certain. Listen to what **Bruce Waltke** wrote about the section of Genesis we are considering these days: ***Fulfilling God's plans is a family of faith and failure: Isaac who depends on his fallible senses and lacks resoluteness, Rebekah who acts by domination and deception, and Jacob who deceives and blasphemously lies. This is a message of hope...the irruption of the kingdom of God ultimately depends on God's sovereign grace, not on human faithfulness. God's promise of hope overrides all of this failure, ultimately using these fallible people to accomplish his good work. (Genesis p.384)***
- Please keep the big idea of **God's** promise of redemption and the lasting hope it contains in mind as we continue the story of Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Esau in the aftermath of their obviously fallible choices—their sins and their failures.

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- Please join me in looking at the last section of Genesis chapter 27 and the beginning of chapter 28—**Genesis 27:41 through 28:9.**

***41 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."***

***42 When Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you. 43 Now then, my son, do what I say: Flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran. 44 Stay with him for a while until your brother's fury subsides. 45 When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I'll send word for you to come back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?"***

- Esau, the grandson of Abraham the man of faith in the Lord and his promises, is not a man of faith. We have seen this demonstrated by his devaluing of the promises of the LORD. Moses wrote that he devalued the promises to the point of "***despising***" them.
- Still Esau is part of that lineage of faith that Moses said back in the days of Enosh, the grandson of Adam "began to call on the name of the Lord. And Esau is part of the lineage of Shem—the one named for the name of the Lord that was to be lifted up in the earth.
- We know that the Lord's appointment of Jacob rather than Esau as the continuation of the line of promise was not an appointment to hell rather than heaven. It was not a rejection of Esau from the family of faith. That was his fallible human choice.
- Not living by faith, even when you are living in the midst of what God is doing, as was Esau—not living by faith always has personal consequences. In Esau's case his lack of faith resulted in him being an angry—even fratricidal man. I cannot imagine walking around in life feeling so angry that as soon as "dad is gone" I'll kill my own brother.

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- This emotional consequence of not living by faith when one doesn't get what one wants that turns people into angry murderers will be evident in the sons of Jacob later in Genesis.
- Israel, as a people, needs to know that not living by faith in the LORD shapes the very nature of individual people, families and nations. This shaping is never good.
- BTW: I think we see this playing out today as the last tiny vestiges of faith in the LORD are being squeezed out of us as a people—as a nation. We, as a nation are becoming an angrier, even murderous people.
- Mama Rebekah was clearly a strong influence on the character of her beloved Jacob. She believes in the promises of God. It is easier to do because those promises seem to suit her own preferences. However, she seems to have little concept of the need for those promises to be attained by faith and attained the LORD's way.
- She is a deceiver and, especially in this context, a controller. The English words my sound like she is giving her advice to Jacob for him to make his own choices but that is not the tone. She is **commanding** Jacob with her strong words.
- This doesn't mean that what Rebekah wants to have happen is wrong. In fact, her desire is to see Jacob lead the family and that aligns with the promises and blessings of the LORD. Again, the issue is how she goes about making God's way happen by her own sinful strength—the strength of her flesh rather than faith in God.
- I've told you we are studying 1 Peter with some of the younger folks just before I preach on Sundays. It is easy to see how much an Israelite like Peter was influenced by the theology of Genesis as I study the books at the same time.
- In 1 Peter 3: 1-7 Peter addresses wives concerning how they are to win over husbands. It is not to be by external and worldly ways but by the inner beauty of a spirit that is gentle and quiet because the

wife is trusting God for the result not her own ability to get what she wants no matter how she has to go about that.

- Peter even uses Sarah as an example of a "holy woman of the past who put her hope in God" rather than her own ways. He does not use Rebekah as a second example of a quiet spirited woman who could rest in her faith in God instead of trying to make things happen.
- Again, I have seen the role of women outside and inside the church change in my lifetime. There were needed correction both inside and outside of the church. However, when you see those corrections being attempted by teaching women to become controlling, demanding and maybe even deceptive, you are not watching the power of God at work as it was in Sarah to help Abraham stay on track with truth. You are watching the fleshly power of Rebekah at work trying to make things happen her way.
- Did the women of Israel in that Promised Land generation need to learn this truth? Do we still?
- Rebekah probably was thinking twenty years when she told Jacob to flee to Laban's house and that he should "stay with him a while." Human plans, even if they are meant to protect God's revealed plans, often have grave intended consequences.
- Rebekah **did lose** Jacob that day, even though she didn't know it. She would never have the opportunity to send for him to come back home. Let's continue in **verse 46**...

***46 Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I'm disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living."***

- Was Rebekah speaking the truth to her blind, nearly dead, weak husband Isaac here? Yes, BUT... Was this what I call **baptizing** her motive to make it more spiritual and godly sounding?

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- I pointed out last week that verses on marrying the wrong women form part of a focusing frame for this section of the story. There will be a few more verses on the subject in just a moment. All of these are an important part of the application for all the mess of this *family of faith and failure* and for the next generation of Israelites—and for us.
- The section began back in the last 2 verses of chapter 26 with the first part of the frame: ***When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath, daughter of Elon (Musk) the Hittite. They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah.***
- Back in chapter 26, Moses doesn't tell us why these two daughters-in-law were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah but he will eventually make this abundantly clear to the Israelites hearing these words. When the LORD's family of faith connects with the family of un-faith—here the Hittites—and here through marriage—when the family of faith connects with un-faith in a covenantal way that joins them together, the family of faith will be compromised by the un-faith.
- Esau was of the family of faith but faith in the LORD and his promises wasn't very important to him. His desire to be married to sources of compromise was more important so he did what he felt like doing and it was a great source of grief to the family of faith.
- This is still true when it comes to marriage today. I tell younger folks who are not married, "*you can fall in love with anyone so don't set yourself up for that fall with an unbeliever.*" Can it work out? Absolutely, but it is not a recommended form of evangelism and it will cause the family of faith great grief along the way.
- And, this is true not only of marriage. This is true of the whole matter of being in the world but not being of the world. It is why Abraham, rich as he was, still lived as a stranger and foreigner in the

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Promised land. It is why Peter calls believers strangers and foreigners in this world we are in but not of.

- How easy it is to compromise the family of faith when faith in the LORD and desire for his plan and care to trust in his ways and not our own strength are not the primary values that motivate life. Are they our values? Are they FBC's values? **Moving along to the first verses of chapter 28...**

***<sup>1</sup>So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him and commanded him:***

***"Do not marry a Canaanite woman. <sup>2</sup> Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. <sup>3</sup>***

***May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. <sup>4</sup> May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham."***

***<sup>5</sup> Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way, and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, who was the mother of Jacob and Esau.***

- Rebekah's desire was correct. It would not be good for Jacob to marry a Canaanite woman even though that may just have been baptizing her justification for sending her beloved son Jacob to safety.
- We've met brother Laban, now Uncle Laban before, as a supplier of proper family-of-faith wives. We will hear more about him in the weeks ahead.
- Isaac is not strong enough to rebuke Jacob in his words to his departing son. It seems Isaac became a weak man under the power of a powerful and deceptive wife. Biblically, that is never good.
- Instead of rebuke, Isaac reinforces the blessing gained by deception even though all along it was intended for Jacob anyway.



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- Isaac makes it clear that the promises and blessing of Abraham, which were passed on to him are now passed on to Jacob. Jacob's lineage, the lineage of the younger son, will be the line of the promises just as God intended.
- Isaac concurs with the wisdom of Rebekah even if not totally aware of her deceptive methods and sends his son to the "right" place to get a wife that will not compromise the family with unfaith. Except, well, wait, there is more news to come!
- And Esau? What about big brother "Red Hairy" the guy who lives for his fleshly appetites and pays little attention to matters of faith in the LORD? Well, Red Hairy is going try to fix things. He is going to try to ameliorate the consequences of his compromises with the world of unbelief. He is going to play "all the king's horses and all the king's men." The milk has already been spilled. **Look at verses 6-9...**

***6 Now Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to Paddan Aram to take a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he commanded him, "Do not marry a Canaanite woman," 7 and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Paddan Aram. 8 Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; 9 so he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, in addition to the wives he already had.***

- Esau finally seems to figure something out in all this mess. He has made some bad choices. He attempts to fix those choices with what seem to him to be good choices.
- What Esau doesn't seem to get yet is something we have talked about in earlier examples. It is not simply the right actions that matter.
- What matters is a growing stance of faith along the path of life rather than a stance of living for the flesh. If we live life for the desires of the flesh, in so many ways it will be too late when the choice and time for actual action come.

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- We will long ago have already decided what we value and we will nearly always automatically live for that value.
- Esau can learn more and grow but Esau cannot undo fleshly choices and their consequences by later working hard to add some "good works" to his resume.
- Framing this story and mixed in with it for the family of faith and failure is the clear warning against compromise for the Israelites. For them, it was most dangerous when the fumbling family of faith compromised by marrying those of the family of un-faith.
- It is ultimately a lack of faith in the LORD and his power to fulfill His promises that produces the lethargy of Isaac, the deceptive controlling of Rebekah, the deceptions of Jacob and the "who-cares" attitude of Esau. Israel will face the same temptations. Mixed marriages will not help them but rather hinder them in facing these temptations.
- Wrong choices coming from any of these stances toward the promises, born out of unbelief rather than faith, will have consequences for Israel.
- The impulse may be to try to fix these wrong choices and their consequences by doing good works. Without faith, it is still impossible to please God even with good works.
- Ultimately, it is a person's, a family's, or a nation's stance toward faith in God—faith to rest in his power and his ways—as the priority that matters, not the works they do.
- In our day, all the mere virtue signaling by good works and good words amounts to nothing. It will not stave off the consequences of sin and fix things. Apart from faith in God, humans cannot do anything along these lines. I am sad for their misunderstanding of good and how to be good people.
- So then, if things got this messed up this early in the history of the family of faith, how is there any hope that the consequences of not

trusting God don't just overwhelm the whole program of God—or certainly keep any of us from participating in it ever again?

- If it is not doing good works to make up for the faith-less works, what is the answer? Let me give you an OT example first from the life of a seasoned sinner who became the King of Israel in the Promised Land.
- When King David had failed miserably in trusting God—when he acted out of the flesh in his own ways by his own power—when he had suffered great consequences for this un-faith—he made it clear good works and virtue signaling won't fix what needs to be fixed to again be part of the LORD's plan.
- Instead he wrote in Psalm 51: ***You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken spirit and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.***
- Again, Peter steeped in OT theology consistent with what we think of as NT theology was getting at the same thing but doing so after Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.
- Peter tells us we don't fix our failures of faith by offering good works to make up for the bad. Our failures are fixed when we face up to the truth of our failed values and priorities and allow our consciences to be cleansed by the sacrificial blood of Jesus rather than focusing on our sin and how to fix it or how to pay God back.
- The Apostle John tells us, when we fail in faith and we will, to be open to the light of the truth of God's word and to confess that that truth is what matters. Then, rather than hiding our failures or trying to atone for them with good works, God will cleanse us from those failures.
- It is what I believe Jesus was doing when he washed Peter's feet. Peter didn't need a bath. He was clean. That was his identity. But walking around in this world he made faith failures. No need for

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Peter to atone or to fix things. What was needed was a frequent cleansing of the world's compromising filth by the LORD. But, Peter had to relent and admit he had dirty feet to allow the Lord to wash them.

- Earlier I read you this quotation from Bruce Waltke: ***Fulfilling God's plans is a family of faith and failure: Isaac who depends on his fallible senses and lacks resoluteness, Rebekah who acts by domination and deception, and Jacob who deceives and blasphemously lies.*** (I left out a few his words in the next line because I wanted to say them to you now. He wrote not just this is a message of hope as if he were thinking only of the Patriarchs's and their messy failures to trust God) No, he wrote... ***This is a message of hope for the CHURCH...the irruption of the kingdom of God ultimately depends on God's sovereign grace, not on human faithfulness. God's promise of hope overrides all of this failure, ultimately using these fallible people to accomplish his good work.***
- The unintended consequences of failures in a family of faith—a family of faith like FBC—don't simply go away.
- We can't fix them by doing good works to balance out the bad works of un-faith.
- But, our hope is in the LORD, he knows how to accomplish his plans in spite of our failures.
- He also knows how to cleanse us and bring us back into the center of His plans when we confess with a broken spirit and contrite heart that we have been living by something other than faith in the LORD Jesus.
- May the decisions we take and the choices we make be motivated by faith in God as individuals, families and as a church in these days when compromise with the world and the worlds' ways of doing things is so easily available to get what we want in the moment and is easily baptized as the work of the Lord when it is not.