

# God's elect must not neglect their position in the Covenant

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Date: 23 February 2020

Preacher: Dylan Marais

[ 0 : 00 ] Right, if you've got your Bibles, just open up to Genesis 25 and we'll get stuck straight in. Remember, Genesis is the account of how all things started. How God first made the world, remember he made it? Good.

And how man messed it all up. And how God is putting it all back together again. Man makes a mess, God steps in to clean it up. A bit like what many of us were doing yesterday. Okay, the story of the covenant comes to a new chapter today. Abraham, the father of the covenant, passes away. And we've been following Abraham's story all these years, months, sorry. And just a short little notice, you'll notice that they put him in the cave of Machpelah where he buried Sarah. And we had a great lesson on what that meant. Remember that it's a reminder to Abraham of his resurrection, that he's going to receive the promises to come.

Abraham, who was old and peaceful and full of years. And then we begin to follow a new chapter in the story of the covenant. The child of promise, Isaac, finally has children, twins.

[ 1 : 07 ] But we see immediately they run into some problems. God again steps in to sort it out. This action of God stepping into history to get active in time and space, to make sure his covenant purposes happen, is a basic truth of the Bible.

And today's story helps us look more closely at the electing purposes of God. So one thing we're going to see is that we're going to see a few things, but the first thing. The story of Jacob and Esau teaches us about the sovereign God who alone decides who is elected to his covenant.

The fact that God is, well, God, that he is sovereign. Now, sovereign just means that he's in control, that he rules. Now, to rule means you've got to make decisions.

Remember we looked at the rulership of Christ over that series just after Christmas? He actually does things, he says things, and things happen. The fact that God is sovereign and that he alone chooses or elects who will be in his covenant, that he doesn't just know the future but that he actually makes it happen, is for many modern audiences a huge and often kind of a little bit unwelcome surprise teaching of the Bible.

It is, of course, foundational to who God is and how he works. And I'd like us to know that covenant, which we've seen as a basic teaching of the scriptures, and election go hand in hand.

[ 2 : 30 ] It's very important to understand the two work together. Now, God's purpose in election is something that the story of Jacob and Esau quite clearly teaches us. However, we really shouldn't be surprised that election is the way that God makes his covenant move forward in history.

He's been acting by means of election ever since the Garden of Eden. Every time God saves, he does by electing someone to save. Does that make sense? The first people that we came across, the first kind of savior in the Old Testament was Noah.

Why did he choose Noah and not anyone else? Well, he just did. It happened that Noah was from the right line, not from Cain's line, but Seth's line. You remember all those different people that we were following. Again, later on, God chooses Abraham.

Abraham, why did he choose Abraham and not everyone else? Just like that. Come, Abraham. I'm going to give you a land. I'm going to give you a future. I'm going to be your God.

Not everyone's God. Your God. And the God of your people. And then we see how God chose Isaac over Ishmael. Remember that story, or stories, of how Abraham wanted to have a child, and they were childless, so couldn't get there.

[ 3 : 39 ] And Sarah said, no, just go with my servant Hagar. And God said, no, no, no. I don't want Ishmael. I want you to have a son, and it'll be Isaac. You remember those stories. Those are all part

of God's electing purposes.

Well, that choosing, that electing, continues in the story today with the birth of Jacob and Esau. Have a look at verse 19 to 21. The account of Abraham's son Isaac.

Abraham became the father of Isaac, and Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel. The Aramean from Paddan Anarim, and sister of Laban, the Aramean. And well done to Michiel for getting all those other names right as well.

Just notice that the story continues with Isaac, but up until verse 19, there's a whole host of other people that the Bible mentions. It's just, okay, there they were. And then it moves on to Isaac.

You with me? And in fact, notice what it says at the end of all these other people. Ishmael's people and children from his other wife, Keturah. Have a look at verse 18.

[ 4 : 38 ] This is Ishmael's descendants settled in the area from Havilah to Shur. That's in Saudi Arabia and a little bit of Ethiopia. Near the border of Egypt as you go towards Asher.

And they lived in hostility towards all their brothers. Just that little note of, hmm, okay. So all these people it's been talking about, they're not actually part of God's purpose. But do you remember what God said to Ishmael when he first had him?

You're going to be fighting. You and your brother are going to be fighting. Interestingly enough, that sort of continues in the story of Jacob and Esau. Verse 19 to 21. This is the account of Abraham's son Isaac.

Abraham became the father of Isaac. Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah, okay.

Verse 21. Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife because she was barren. Okay, we've been here before in the story of the Bible.

The Lord answered her prayer and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. Rebekah cannot conceive. They've been married for 20 years at this point. Remember what was promised her when she left her descendants, her family.

[ 5 : 39 ] You'll be the mother of thousands. 20 years and nothing. Okay, so God is in direct control of what happens in her womb. You with me? They're still waiting for their blessing.

Isaac prays. God answers. And instead of a double blessing, two twins, two people, two children, one twin I guess, it begins to turn into kind of like a curse. The twins are in the womb and they're so violent.

Now, our NIV says they were jostling each other. Verse 22. The babies were jostling within her. The Hebrew word there is actually one of the commentators translated as smashing each other. There was kind of like a fight to the death inside the womb.

If you see two little babies inside the womb. It was so bad. She had to go, Lord, what's going on over here? It feels like she's going to be kicked to pieces. Rebekah cries out to God in perplexity. And then God makes a kind of a very mysterious sort of prophetic reply. Verse 23. The Lord said to her, two nations are in your womb and two peoples from within you will be separated.

[ 6 : 40 ] It's a coupling verse. Each time he mentions something, it kind of intensifies as he goes along. One people will be stronger than the other and the older will serve the younger. It's ominous rumblings of something that's going to come out of here.

Danger. Conflict. I'm not sure at this stage quite what that means, but it does set us up for the rest of the story. So the first thing we've got to realize in the story is that God has electing purposes in history.

And we just have to deal with that as Christians and know that that's how God actually works. And that's basic to his covenant. But far from kind of making that sound as if God is unfair, it actually is a comfort to us.

And so I'd like to look at point number two. The surprising election of Jacob over above Esau should give us hope and comfort. You with me? The Bible then compares and contrasts Isaac and Esau, verse 24 to 28.

When the time came for it to give birth, there were twin boys in a womb. The first to come out was red. And his whole body was like a hairy garment. So the name of Esau is sort of wild and woolly, this guy. He's almost grown up like a full man coming out of the womb.

[ 7 : 44 ] Interestingly enough, this thing about red hair carries its way all the way through church history. They used to paint Judas with red hair.

The deceiver, you know, the one Jesus thing. And after this, Esau comes out. After this, his brother came out with his hand gasping Esau's heel.

Is he trying to pull him back? Is he trying to chuck him out? Is he trying to get him? So his name was Jacob. And as you know, Jacob means someone who grabs the heel. Esau means red or hairy. Esau means hairy. Edom means red. We'll get there. Now, and then they grow up. The boys grew up.

Verse 27. Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country. Well, Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau.

[ 8 : 42 ] But Rebecca loved Jacob. Now, Esau sounds like he's big and strong and could well turn out to be a leader of men. If you were choosing the men who would be in your sort of covenantal hunting team, you would pick Esau.

Big and strong, active. Jacob, on the other hand, would be the one you last picked. Or maybe if you had a covenantal cooking competition, maybe. Shy, hanging around the tents with the women.

As you know, Jacob's name is important to grasp by the heel. The connotation, of course, is someone who is sneaky and deceptive. Based on these descriptions, you would expect that the natural choice for God to who he would choose to inherit his covenant promises would be Esau.

Big and strong, active. Instead, he rejects Esau and chooses Jacob. And then look at Jacob, how Jacob goes about getting his blessing from Esau. Yes, Esau can well be blamed, and we'll do that just now.

But Jacob is by no means squeaky clean in this situation, in what happens next. You know the story quite well. Esau comes back to the camp from a seemingly fruitless hunting trip.

[ 9 : 51 ] Sees Jacob making stew. Give me some of that stew. Jacob makes a shocking reply. First, sell me your birthright. Now, this is his own brother coming to see him.

Let alone Eastern hospitality law dictates it. You don't make any demand on someone who needs food. You just give it. And it's his own brother. Clearly, there's no love lost between the two. Esau tries to bluff him off.

I'm about to die. What good is my birthright? He should have told Jacob to shove off. Nevertheless, Jacob replies in a very offhand manner. In fact, it's even more striking in the Hebrew.

Sell. Birthright. Now. He's not budging. And he's not being nice at all about what is needed here.

He's not letting go. And he's refusing hospitality unless he can get something out of it.

And it's not a small thing. He's actually demanding everything from Esau, who has every right to inherit the promises. Sadly, Esau takes the faithful step. And sells it to Jacob. And then to top it off, Jacob is so deceptive, he doesn't even give him the red stew.

[ 10 : 52 ] He gives him a bowl of lentil soup. Now. Okay. If you love lentil soup, then you think that that's a blessing. Stony cold silence descends.

Esau eats it. Drinks. Gets up on Esau. And clearly, Jacob is a chosen one to inherit God's covenant promises. Esau is summarily dismissed.

So Esau despises his birthright. So I've called this point, the surprising election of Jacob should give us hope and comfort. Now, why did I say that? Well, think of the kinds of people that God continues to call into his covenant, into his kingdom, today.

Did Jacob deserve to get an inheritance? Not at all. He's sneaky, deceptive, cold, demanding, manipulative, unloving. A little bit like us, if you think about it.

And here's why God's election or elective purpose is actually so glorious and helpful. He gives an inheritance to people who by no means deserve it.

[ 11 : 54 ] Can you see that from the text? He calls people into his kingdom not because of their great inner strength or good works or noble character. He calls people into his kingdom in spite of who they are.

In spite of their station life. He takes people who at the bottom puts them on the top. We saw those things happening at the build up to Christmas. He takes people full of the muck and the mire of sin, picks them up, washes them off, puts them back on their feet, sends them on their way, smiling and happy because of their changed character, their changed circumstances, and their changed future. You with me on that? Look at who Jesus calls into his kingdom. Fishermen, tax collectors, sinners, lost, the broken, the weak, the lame, the blind. Paul makes a very similar point in the letter to the Corinthians.

He reminds them of who they are when God called them. Something that we can relate to, no doubt. 1 Corinthians chapter 1. I'll just put it up on the screen. Consider your calling, my brothers.

Not many of you were wise. He's talking to the church at Corinth. And by the way, that's a small little house church. We would be like a mega church in the ancient world. It was probably just a few pews of people sneaking out and trying to get to church without being seen.

[13:12] Consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Some were, but not many. Not many were of noble birth. Some were, but the most weren't.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, so that no human being may boast in the presence of God. Jacob's election into covenant inheritance ahead of Esau gives us hope. Us, us, sitting here, us. Because no one deserves their place in the covenant. It is only given by grace.

It is comforting. Because just like Jacob, not one single one of us deserves the grace of God. We too are like Jacob, weak and broken, full of sin.

And in spite of the way we've lived, God has elected and chosen us to be recipients of the most precious thing that he can give. Forgiveness, life, reconciliation, mercy, grace.

[14:16] In a word, Christ. So I'm hoping that you see that election here is a very helpful thing. But there is a warning, and I've got to give it. And it's a difficult thing to do, but it must be done.

If you're walking down the train tracks like we were yesterday, and no one bothered to blow that whistle and tell you, Yay, move off the tracks, the train is coming. That would be the last project event that I ever did here at St. Mark's, right?

So warnings are actually helpful. Now, just because we went, so my third point, the deserved rejection of Esau should serve as a warning. You with me? Looking at Esau now.

Now, just because we have been elected by God does not mean we should take it for granted. We mustn't take our election into the covenant, our position in the covenant, for granted. If anything, the Bible teaches us the opposite.

And the sad case of Esau shows what happens when we neglect our privileged position in the covenant. When Jacob makes his shocking demand to Esau to set his birthright, Esau should have told him to get lost.

[15:19] I mean, think about what his birthright was valued at. The entire land of Canaan. We're talking about tens of thousands of kilometers of square, of real estate. Square kilometers of real estate.

You know, when Abraham died, he was really, really rich. He gave all those gifts to his children, but gave everything to Isaac, right? Remember, he bought that plot of land for millions of rands?

And that's nothing compared to what he's going to get when he gets up again from the grave. But instead of telling Jacob to get lost, that my inheritance is worth more than just this bowl of soup, he starts giving us excuses.

Verse 22. Do you see what he does? Oh, sorry, not verse 22. Verse 32. Look, I'm about to die. What good is the birthright to me?

No, Esau, you're not about to die. Stop being such a... Dot, dot, dot. What good is my birthright to me? Well, actually, it means everything. God's promise of inheritance are never empty promises, but carry with them the power to deliver you alive to be able to enjoy them.

[16:26] So Esau's busy making excuses. Jacob makes him swear an oath. The entire land of Canaan for a bowl of stew. And then it gets worse.

He doesn't even get the stew. That's the red stew. That's where Edom comes from. You remember Adam in the Garden of Eden? Adam and Edom means red, same kind of thing. Edom then becomes a nation just outside Israel, in the south and the east.

And they later on try and stop the Israelites from coming into the land. You remember that? And God judges them for that. Esau says, ah, I don't even get this red stew.

I just got some lentil stew. Like, at least Esau just get the red stew. Just the lentil stew. Instead, he seems to shrug his shoulders. Ah, who cares?

Scoffs down the stew, gets up and leaves. So Esau, while he looks strong, active, a leader on the outside, on the inside, he's impatient.

[17:29] He's weak. And he gives in to his impulsive nature. Can you see that? He exchanges the entire land of the blessings of the living God for nothing. And all because he wants to give in to the desire for immediate, I must have this stew now.

I'll do anything to get this stew. I can't wait. No, you can wait. Leave this thing that's standing in front of you that you seriously want. Just leave it. It's not worth it. That's exactly, by the way, how sin operates.

Sin always looks nice and shiny. And it makes the thing that we're waiting for look dull and boring. That's why you've got to be a Christian to see these things. It's the thing we're waiting for that's shiny and glorious.

And the sin that looks so enticing is actually really just like a bowl of lentil soup. I hope I'm not putting you off your vegan diets, by the way. Maybe we give up lentil for lent and it'll work for us. Okay. He treats the weighty promises of God with no regard. He takes his privileged position for granted and shows that he doesn't value it nearly enough. Shug your shoulders.

[ 18 : 34 ] Ach, whatever. Walks away. Okay. So not for nothing does the New Testament warn us against this kind of attitude. You saw what we read in Hebrews chapter 10 earlier. Now I want to look at us.

Well, Hebrews 12 actually tells us exactly what the Bible thinks of Esau. This is what it says in Hebrews 12. It should come up on the screen as well.

See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.

Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit his blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears. Bless me, me too, my father.

He could not change what he had done. Earlier we read the dire warning of Hebrews 10. Now to be honest, these things should scare us a little or they should scare us a lot.

[ 19 : 38 ] We need to take the Bible's warning seriously about falling away. We simply must not let sin get the upper hand in our lives. If we do, we could well be lost to the kingdom.

You understand that we've got to take these warnings seriously, not lightly. And that we take our place in the covenant as a privileged position seriously. We mustn't think that just because we are elect, that we can relax and take our election and place in the covenant for granted.

In fact, the Bible tells us to do the exact opposite. Because we are elect. And especially us who are Gentile stock, that's us who are not part of the Jews originally.

We who have been invited from the outside, we should above all not take our election for granted. And instead do what the Bible calls and what 2 Peter 1 says, we must make our election and calling sure.

Think of it like this. Imagine you had a child who was musically gifted enough to go to the top musical school on the planet. Like the Royal Academy in London, for example. But of course, you simply don't have the money or the means to ever get them there.

[ 20 : 43 ] So it's a dream that will never happen. But every year they take a wild card entry and wonder of wonders your little girl gets chosen out of all the people to go and study. What are you going to tell her? Hey, they chose you.

Go and have a holiday. Do what you like. Just relax. Don't worry about your behavior. Don't worry about what you're going to study. They chose you. You can do what you want. Is there any mom in the world who's ever going to say that to their child?

What do you say? No. You're going to impress on your child what a privilege she's received to go and how others aren't there. And that because she has been chosen, she must make doubly sure she's worthy of her calling.

She must work extra hard and be extra polite and have extra thankful attitude. She can't just pitch up and not bother to work or skive off and do what she wants.

You understand what I'm saying? You understand that analogy? Does that help a little bit? The warning in Hebrews 10, which we read earlier, is telling us to be careful of that kind of attitude when we take our salvation for granted.

[ 21 : 44 ] Let's turn over to Hebrews 10. We'll end our time there because we need to look at a few things. Hebrews chapter 10. Now, it starts off saying, my Bible, the headings are not inspired by God, but they're sometimes helpful.

And this one is, mine says, a call to persevere. It's calling the Hebrew Christians to not give up their faith in Christ. I'm going to look at a few things in a second, but if you look at verse 26, if we deliberately keep on sinning, after you've received the knowledge of truth, no sacrifice for sins is

left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

That's not a picture of God that we often pick up in the Bible, but it's there. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

How much more severely? Note that. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who is treated as an holy thing, the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and was insulted the spirit of grace.

You know, once I was in London many years ago, and people walking up and down the street, and a very tall man, big guy, tripped over someone's wife by mistake.

[ 23 : 07 ] It happened to be a very small guy. And they had words, they had words, but you know, you don't fight in England. And eventually the big guy just spat in the little guy's face. He was so angry. Like that.

And like, I was standing, you know, I just nearly climbed in. I would have been hammered down. My sister was there. No, no, no, no one gets involved, and so you don't. But you know that thing where you spit in, you know how demeaning and hostile that makes someone, where you spit in their face. That's like insulting the spirit of God. For we know him, we know him who said, it is mine to avenge, I will repay. And again the Lord will judge his people.

And note this, it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. That should scare you. It should scare you. It should make you go, okay, let me just check where I am.

Am I playing like a, am I just playing on the train tracks here, not taking these warnings seriously? Or am I listening to God and making sure that I don't neglect my privileged position in the covenant? Right, well, we know what we mustn't do.

[ 24 : 12 ] What are some of the things that we can do to ensure that we stay in the covenant? With me, you want to take your covenant promises seriously. How do we do that? Well, the text is going to help us. So let's end our time together thinking how we're going to help each other make our calling and election show.

Well, have a look at the first few verses. Let's start at verse 23. There's a whole bunch of stuff there, but we'll just pick a few out from verse 23. It says, Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

God is faithful. He doesn't just promise us his kingdom and then leave us to our own devices. He provides all the means necessary to help us through life's ups and downs.

Think of a lifeboat analogy. Nick has taught us before about how the church, who we are, not where we are, but who we are is like a lifeboat that gets us to the shore of our inheritance, our ultimate salvation.

God isn't just going to pull you out of the sea and put you in a lifeboat and then let you starve before you get safely to the shore. You don't have to jump out of the lifeboat to go looking for food.

[ 25 : 25 ] He will give you what you need to get there. Trust him. He is faithful. He will provide you what you need. Hang on tight to his promises, especially when the seas of life get rough.

That's not the time to jump out the boat. That's the time to stay in the boat and let the captain who knows what he's doing tell you what to do and then just do it. You've got to trust him. You're with me. Verse 24.

Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. So here's a thing for us to think about. Have you spent time thinking about how you can help another Christian?

How you can help them love other Christians better or do something nice for someone else? How can you spur them on? It's an image of a coach. Come on, guys. Come on. Let's go. Let's go.

Let's go. You can do it. You can do it. It's not only the pastor's job. I guess it's kind of our job. It's all about... This is not to pastors. This is to people in the church. We are too often caught up in our own worlds to think of how we can help others.

[ 26 : 31 ] Well, brothers and sisters, we are a family. We have to look out for each other and to help each other. Let us consider. That means spend time and effort thinking about how we can together help each other live better.

Better Christian lives. At the very least, we need to spend time thinking how we individually can help out our fellow believer who is struggling. I'm hoping that those kinds of conversations will start happening more and more as we start to develop our mercy ministry, I guess.

Our outreaches. It's intended for us to do precisely what this verse is talking about. Think about yesterday on the tracks. It was hard work. True. We all gave up something that we'd rather be doing.

Let's be honest. Cleaning up the train tracks in Plumstead. In fact, we cleaned up the effluent that was coming out of the toilet at the train stations. Those are outside the track.

Like, phew. We spent time together. But in spite of all that, we enjoyed it. We spent time together. We did good for our community. We were laughing and smiling.

[ 27 : 34 ] We actually had a fun time. In the end, it wasn't really a chore. It was actually a pleasure. Kind of left with a bit of a buzz. We were more motivated and feeling more part of, I guess, of each other, of a church.

Feeling more part of a community. And that is what church is all about. That's where our last verse leaves us. It's all about community. Verse 25.

Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching. Meeting together as God's people should be a time of sweet encouragement.

And it is, if you think about it. Who of us were not encouraged or built up by all the songs we were singing today? Whose burdens were not lifted as we said our prayers?

We all benefited from the reading of God's word. Even if sometimes, like today, it can be a little bit scary. We all love seeing each other and checking in to see how things are going.

[ 28 : 34 ] If you want to be more encouraging, ask someone what you can pray for if you don't do that. So make a habit of when we meet after, say, hey, you know, you're chatting. Hey, is there anything I can pray for?

Let's exhort to faithfulness. Exhort, encourage. Let's offer help. Let's give words of encouragement. Let's ask for things to pray for. These are not the job of the pastors only.

These are all our jobs. They are our privileges. In fact, yeah, they're not our jobs. It's a privilege to be able to serve God and his covenant members in this way.

These privileges are given only to the covenant elect. Why would we not want to use them more and more? Just to end off by reading those last few verses in chapter 10, the writer says this, verse 35, So, after warning and after telling them to stay steadfast even through the hard times, so, do not throw away your confidence.

It will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

[ 29 : 41 ] For in just a very little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.