

Take Heed and Take Heart

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Well, if you've got your Bibles, leave them there in Genesis 27. And so we're continuing our series in Genesis, and we see that the lives of Jacob and Esau come to a climactic and dramatic head in our story today. It's an incredible piece of writing, probably some of the most dramatic writing in all of Scripture. And it's filled with all sorts of clashing passions and longings and desires and hopes. They all come to a head here in the story.

And today's story reads like the script of a play, and the drama unfolds sort of scene by scene. We'll unpack that in a moment, but I just want to highlight the two main ideas for us that we need to come to grips with today. And the two main things we need to kind of hold in tension a little bit until the story resolves itself is both a warning and an encouragement. We need to take heed, that means to watch out for, to listen. We need to take heed that a life lived in sinful defiance of God will lead to inevitable ruin. But we also need to take heart and be encouraged that our sinful failings cannot defeat the inevitable purposes of God's covenant blessings. Okay, so it's a bit of a mouthful for a sermon heading. So just to repeat that, we need to take heed. Okay, there's a strong warning in our passage today, similar to what we've seen in Esau's life before, but with a slight difference. There's a strong warning in our passage today that a life lived in sinful defiance of God will lead to inevitable ruin. But we also need to take heart that our sinful failings cannot defeat the inevitable purpose of God's covenant blessings. Now, if you listen carefully, you'll be asking yourself, oh, hang on a second, those two sound like the same thing. How can sin both lead to ruin and to blessing? So you'll need to listen carefully to the sermon, to the whole sermon, to understand why there's some crucial differences between the two. Let's take a closer look at our passage to see how the lives and the choices of our various characters, the choices they make, feed into their ultimate ruin or their ultimate salvation. Scene one, interestingly, doesn't start in chapter 27. It starts in chapter 26, not with Isaac and his weak eyesight, but with Esau, marrying not one, but two Canaanite wives, causing grief and in some translations, making life bitter for Isaac and Rebecca. Chapter 26, verse 35, they were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebecca. And the entire story moves on through chapter 27 and ends actually in chapter 28 with Esau seemingly having learned his lesson, but again, not quite finding the target. He adds a third wife, and this was one from the line of Ishmael. And you'll remember that Ishmael himself is still outside God's promises.

So Esau is trying to do it right, I guess. He's trying to make amends, but it's actually not quite right. These two marriage stories act as a kind of a bookmark that sandwiched the story of Esau together, and it tells you that, well, not the story of Esau, but the whole story. It tells you that the main focus really is Esau and the choices he makes, and we've got to learn some lessons from that.

That's scene one. Scene two opens with Isaac wanting to pass on the blessing to Esau, and the problems immediately start compounding. Firstly, he doesn't just want to give the blessing to Esau, but he wants to do it in exchange for some tasty food. You'll see that little phrase, delicious food, happens there quite a lot in these first opening lines. He says, verse 4, chapter 27 now, verse 4, prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die. Bit of irony there. You remember that Esau sold his birthright for some tasty food.

Seems like Isaac is thinking with his stomach, not with the promises of God in mind. And not only that, he's invited Esau to a private blessing ceremony and hasn't summoned Jacob. Now, there's strict customs when passing a covenant blessing on.

You've got to do them in public, not just in private. So Isaac seems to be trying to kind of force the hand of God a bit toward Esau over here and away from Jacob. Then we move on to scene three.

[4 : 51] Rebecca is having none of that. She hears what is going on and leaps into action, full of ideas and plans to make sure Jacob gets the blessings and not Esau. She remembers what God has told her and wants to make sure that she contributes to his covenant purposes. Sounds good,

but she goes about it in one of the most underhanded ways that is recorded in the Bible. She cajoles and commands poor unwilling Jacob to dress up in goatskin and is ready to call down the curse of God on herself if it fails. The stakes couldn't be higher. And scene four is full of tension as Jacob dodges and ducks and dives and Isaac sends that something is not quite right. Jacob wants the blessings for himself, but he's not above deception or lying or even blasphemy invoking God's name to keep the wool pulled over Isaac's eyes. Verse 20. Isaac asked his son, how did you find the food so quickly, my son? The Lord, your God, gave me success, he replies. You remember that that's another irony because when Abraham took Isaac onto the mountain to sacrifice him and there's a goat. No, no, God will provide a goat or lamb.

Notice that Jacob says the Lord, your God. He doesn't say the Lord, our God. Jacob is using God to get what he wants. Isaac is finally satisfied, thinks it's Esau and then gives him the blessing. And what a blessing.

You'll of course notice that as elements of the original blessing God gave to Abraham with the added elements that he, well, you see, Isaac thinks it's, he's giving it to Esau, but with the added elements that whoever gets a blessing will be the ruler over his brothers. This is a kingly blessing indeed. It's worth highlighting.

So from verse 27. So he went to him and kissed him. That's obviously part of the covenant ceremonies. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said, ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed. May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness and abundance of grain and new wine. And may nations serve you and peoples bow down to you.

Be Lord over your brothers and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed. You'll remember it's got echoes of Abraham coming through here. Verse 30. Isaac finished blessing him and Jacob had scarcely left his father's presence. His brother Esau came in from hunting food. They just missed each other. [7 : 38] Scene five. We come to the tragic and really pathetic heart of the story. Esau at last enters the scene. Isaac, to his horror, realizes he's given the blessing to the wrong son.

Who are you? I'm your son. Your firstborn. Esau. Isaac trembled violently. The scene is full of turmoil. Isaac is deeply disturbed. And Esau cries out in even deeper horror and regret.

And tries desperately to get Isaac to bless him. Verse 34. When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry.

And says to his father, bless me. Me too, my father. He's like taking him by his... No, this can't have happened. Esau realizes he's just lost everything.

He repeats it in verse 38. Esau says to his father, Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father. And Esau wept aloud.

[8 : 50] It's a deep and desperate pleading. But, it's too late. The inevitable has happened. Isaac has given his blessing to Jacob.

And it is irrevocable. It cannot be called back or undone. Esau is left with nothing but his bitter tears. And he gets a blessing that is the exact opposite of what one wants in a blessing.

See what Isaac is left to give him. Verse 39. Your dwelling will be away from the earth's richness.

Away from the dew of heaven above. He gets the exact opposite of what Jacob is going to get.

He will live by the sword. Meaning you're going to be fighting. And you will serve your brother. The silver lining. When you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck.

There's going to be fighting the whole way. Esau immediately boils over with rage. Blames Jacob for everything. And wants to kill him. Then scene 6 opens.

[9 : 55] Rebecca again leaps into rescue to make sure that Jacob isn't killed. She's again full of cajoling and manipulation. Isaac sees at last that Jacob is indeed the one that God has chosen.

And confirms it by giving him the blessing again. This time ensuring that he gets the full blessing that God gave to Abraham. Jacob scuttles off to Laban to go find a wife.

And then scene 7 closes out the play. Esau sees what is going on and desperately tries to make amends by marrying a non-Canonite wife. Instead he gets an Ishmaelite wife and doesn't really help. Because Ishmael himself is not included in the covenant.

It's all too little, too late for Esau. Nothing he does will bring him back into a place where he can receive the covenant inheritance.

Well, there's both triumph and tragedy here on epic proportions. One of the things you'll have noticed is this is a deeply dysfunctional family.

[10:55] No one here deserves the blessings of God. Each one of them is deeply flawed and broken in their own way. And yet Esau is singled out as not only not being worthy, but then also being excluded from God's covenant purposes.

And we need to ask why. Why is he excluded but Isaac, Rebekah, and Jacob not? Now you remember that part of that answer, as we saw previously in the story, lies in God's election. Something we explored a few weeks ago. But it also has to do with how Esau has lived his life. You remember from our last talk that the New Testament picks up Esau's life as an example for us not to follow.

That's the reference in Hebrews chapter 12. I'll just read it for us. 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 godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. And afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit his blessing, he was rejected.

[12:03] Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done. Now if we're meant to take Esau's life as a warning, as the New Testament says we should, we need to ask precisely, what is it that we must avoid?

What are the things that Esau did wrong that we mustn't follow? After all, we don't want to end up in the same trap. We don't want to end up in the same situation, living a life that is ruined by sin.

So when we take a closer look at Esau's life, there are three main things to show us that in the overall trajectory of the life that he lives, Esau does indeed get what he deserves.

As sad and as horrible as that is to think about, we need to take this warning seriously as we've been learning. So first of all, Esau lives a life that constantly gives in to his sinful urges.

Esau lives a life that constantly gives in to his sinful urges. We first meet Esau or met Esau when he was trying to kill Jacob in the womb. He's not even out of the womb and he's ready. There's something going wrong there.

[13:08] Okay, Jacob obviously fights back. But then we meet him again as his stomach is demanding to be fed and he's willing to exchange his covenant birthright for a bowl of red stew.

The red stew in front of him is preferred to the promises ahead of him. We meet him again in our story today, many years later, and he hasn't changed his ways.

He hasn't gone to find a wife from among God's covenantally approved family, remember like Abraham did with Isaac. Instead, Esau sees some lovely Canaanite woman and again reaches out and takes them, not caring about the consequences.

So what we have here is someone not living a life directed towards God, but rather directed towards his own appetites, his own selfish desires.

Esau lives for what he can get now, for what he can see in front of him. If he wants it, he takes it and to hang with the consequences. He gives in too quickly and too often to his sinful impulses.

[14:17] He doesn't say no to anything. He's too hot-blooded. He's red inside and out. As one preacher puts it, Esau is constantly hankering after the red stuff.

Delicious food, fast woman. Esau is constantly giving in to his sinful urges. Secondly, Esau doesn't repent when he gets the chance.

It sounds like he does. It's not actual real repentance. When Esau's life of living to gratify himself finally catches him out, as it does in our story today, he hasn't got the power to change it at all.

All he can do is weep bitter tears for the loss that he feels. He is sorry not for what he has done, but only for the consequences it has caused, for what he'll be missing out on.

It doesn't show any real repentance at all. If he did have genuine remorse, he would have begged forgiveness from the Lord and from Isaac as he was talking with him when he realized what has happened.

[15:19] But instead, he lashes out in anger and blames Jacob. Have a look at verse 36.

Esau said, Isn't he rightly named Jacob? You remember that means deceit? He has deceived me these two times. He took my birthright and now he's taken my blessing.

So he's still blaming Jacob for everything that has gone wrong with his life. He doesn't take any personal responsibility for the situation he finds himself in.

He didn't do anything wrong. It's all Jacob's fault. Disappointment leads to bitterness, bitterness to rage, and rage to thoughts of murder.

His regret, his remorse, doesn't lead to a change of character. You see that. And then thirdly, Esau takes God's grace for granted.

[16:18] Or maybe he takes, at the same level, he takes his covenant relationship with God for granted. Esau lives a life in defiance of God and his word and his promises and then expects everything to be given to him when he feels like having it.

Esau thought God would answer to his call when he felt like it. Instead, it was him, Esau, that needed to listen to God. Esau got so angry so quickly.

He expected God to deliver his promises when Esau was good and ready to receive them. Esau's like that guy that I'm sure we've all met at some stage in our lives. Don't worry.

I'll make my peace with the big man upstairs when I'm good and ready. We have an understanding. Wink, wink, wink, nod, nod. I've actually, I've literally had that conversation with someone. Really? Really? You're 100% sure about that? Sounds like an awful big gamble to me. So does the God of the Bible strike you as someone who is just waiting around, letting you do your thing, abusing him, abusing others, and happy to take you on your terms when you're ready?

[17:29] That's not the God I read about in the Bible. Just think about it. Does any human relationship work that way? I mean, we all know what happens when our children are called to dinner or to finish a chore and they're too busy playing.

Hang on, mom. I'm just busy playing. I'll get to you just now when I'm done. I'm sorry. What did you just say? We can't live our lives thinking that we can get to God later when we feel like it.

You might not never have a later and you might find that God isn't waiting around for you. We mustn't take God's grace for granted. Well, I hope that helps with seeing why Esau does get what he deserves as sort of chilling as that is for us to hear.

But Esau is not the only character in these scenes. We need to deal with the others who have similar failings but nonetheless inherit God's blessings. So we end our time together thinking or taking encouragement that despite our failings, God's purposes of blessings for his people won't and can't be thwarted.

So we need to take heart because our sinful failings cannot defeat God's inevitable purposes for covenant blessings. Isaac, Rebekah, and Jacob all have huge character flaws and they're all on display for us to see.

[18:51] The difference between them and Esau is that they are desperate not for the things of this world but for being included in the covenant. Their longings and desires are for the promises of God.

Isaac knows how important the covenant is and that it must be given before he dies so that he can pass on to the next generation. He tries to give it to the wrong person but God won't let that happen. Rebekah carves out a place for Jacob in the most devious way possible and yet God honors her schemes and accepts Jacob. And Jacob well he's more than happy to receive the inheritance and will do whatever it takes to make sure that he gets it as well.

Well the thing is that they want the promises of God and understand the value that being in the covenant has for them. Yes they've got failings and they make horrible mistakes but those mistakes are made in the direction of living for the covenant promises not against it.

They want to receive what God promises. They're in fact living by faith even if it shows up imperfectly in their lives. They're taking God's word and God's promises seriously and they're acting diligently to make sure they get it.

[20:04] They don't want to miss out on what God has to offer. They're not treating God or taking his word lightly or dismissing it with contempt. Neither are they living their life as they please.

They're making the effort and indeed taking risks to ensure that they're included in the covenant promises. It doesn't negate their flaws or mistakes or failings but it does mean they're in right standing with God in spite of all their failings.

They're chasing after God and what he has to offer and not after what the world has to offer. They want God more than they want sin. God doesn't take people into his covenant who are already perfect and won't ever make mistakes.

He's looking for people who know what his promises are worth and who chase after that rather than after other things. Now that doesn't mean that our sins count for nothing. Sin is sin.

Sin is serious and if it's not dealt with, sin will lead to our ruin. It will kill us. What God wants us to do is to take our sin to him and not hold on to it.

[21 : 15] We have to take it to the person he has provided that has the power and authority to forgive it and take it completely away. We must take our sin to Christ. sin. The words of 1 John 2 will help us knowing what to do with our sin and how to live our life in the direction that God wants.

It should be on the screen. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world. We know that we have to come to know him if we keep his commands.

Whoever says, I know him, but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them.

This is how we know we are in him. Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. Some translations say must walk as Jesus did. But it's telling us to live a life, in a certain direction towards Christ.

[22 : 28] And that when we fall and stumble and falter, that's okay. It's okay, but it's also not okay. You don't have to fall and stumble and falter all the way down to where Esau is.

You're going to fall and stumble and falter. Take your sin to Christ. If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He's the sacrifice for our sins.

So being in covenant with God doesn't mean we don't make mistakes or that we don't have character flaws. We do. Being in covenant with God means that our lives have a fundamental new direction toward God and away from sin.

This is to live a life in line with the covenant promises of God and constantly take our failings to him, to get them forgiven, and to receive help not to continue in them.

remember the story of a church-going teenager many years ago now. She was caught drinking with some friends she shouldn't have been with. In fact, she got way in over her head and had to be rescued, actually, from quite a dangerous situation.

[23 : 34] And she couldn't even get up the stairs to her house. She'd been drinking so much, and she literally stumbled into the gutter. And all she kept saying over again and again, I'm so sorry, Jesus.

I'm so sorry, Jesus. And just like that, the next day her life started changing. She never saw her old friends again. She had a new direction.

She developed a new lifestyle, and she had a new hope. Genuine repentance leads to a new life, not wanting to go back to our old ways, cherishing the forgiveness and grace of God, constantly making use of the forgiveness and power that is in Christ, taking our past mistakes to Jesus.

letting him wash them away, and taking our present character flaws to him and letting him change us. As we struggle along in our faith and sinful mistakes, we can take heart that we serve a God that doesn't let our faults stop him from blessing us.

If we remain in Christ, his promises are sure and real. We'll receive his blessings in our lives, both here and now, but ultimately and completely in the world to come.

[24 : 48] Amen. Amen.