

Topic	Jacob and Esau
Reference	Genesis 25:19-34
Date	30 August 2020
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Once again, it's my joy and privilege to be standing here, sharing you from the word of God. After a two week break where Brother Arnold took us through two important sermons on biblical mental health, this morning we continue with our long running series on Genesis.

We are right now, right in the middle of the book with a text taken from chapter 25 verses 19 to 34. The sermon title is simply "Jacob and Esau". This is the beginning of the account of these twin brothers, which most of you are very familiar with. Now, the account of Jacob and Esau stretches all the way to chapter 36.

At this point in Genesis, the account of Abraham comes to an end. Verse 8 in Genesis 25, which is outside our text, says that Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age. We started learning about Abraham from chapter 12, and so we have 14 chapters on the story of Abraham. From this point on until chapter 35, the focus shifts to Jacob and we have about 11 chapters in all on this.

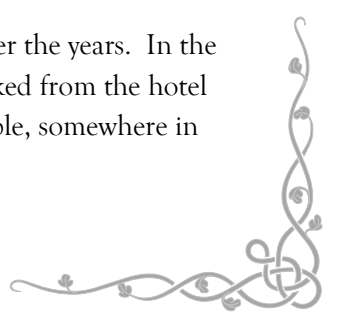
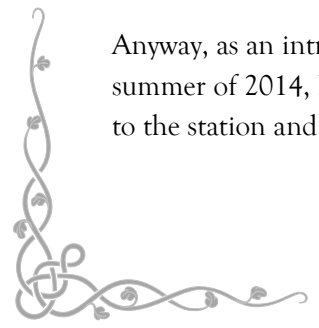
In between there are passages that spotlight Isaac, but not nearly as much as the narratives on Abraham and Jacob. And then from chapter 37, the main character would be Joseph and that goes all the way until the end of the book, 14 chapters. So about 80% of Genesis is a lot about Abraham, a little bit about Isaac, a lot about Jacob and a lot about Joseph and this is to give you a sentence that a bulk of a study of Genesis is really character studies, studies on all these Old Testament Patriarchs.

But as you saw in Genesis 22, which I preach on early this month these characters studies are really floating on the surface, so to speak, they are the apparent themes that come right out from the verses, but they are also the latent themes lying beneath the verses, which we need to uncover, and they can teach us a lot about God and his character and his will, which is what we are all going to do later in a sermon where we dig deeper into this block of verses from Genesis 25, but shall we first commit this time to the Lord in prayer.

Our father in heaven, your ways are higher than our ways, your thoughts higher than our thoughts. Even so grant us a larger glimpse of yourself and your nature as we embark on this passage from Genesis 25, through these verses from your word may your spirit illumine our finite minds so that we may align our lives with your perfect will. For this we ask in the name of your son, Amen.

Whenever my wife and I travel overseas, and if it's a Sunday, we will try to find a church near the hotel, so that we can attend Sunday service. To be found in the house of God on the Lord's Day is good and has become such an integral part of our lives. And that's why when we resume physical service in the middle of last month, my wife and I were very eager to go to church so to say.

Anyway, as an introduction to the sermon, I want to highlight the four churches that I visited over the years. In the summer of 2014, I was in London for a week to attend a meeting, and each morning when I walked from the hotel to the station and each evening on the way back, I would pass by this lovely church with tall steeple, somewhere in



London. Now I cannot remember the name of the church, but it was always locked. I never saw a cow or anybody inside the compound. There was also no notice, you know, to say about church meetings or anything like that. But nevertheless, I told myself Sunday morning, I would come by and see if they had the worship service that I could attend. Sunday morning came, I walked through the church, and still the same thing, not a soul in sight. And so I gave up.

In 2018, my wife and I were in Perth, Australia for a holiday, and we found this beautiful church in the city center, which I shall not name for reasons you will realize afterwards. This time I Googled for information and I found out they conducted a worship service every Sunday morning, which we attended, but sadly, they were barely a dozen, or less than a dozen parishioners inside. Now I know quality is more important than quantity, but by any measure, it appeared to me like a dying church.

Then in 2015, we were in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and we came across this New Life Church somewhere in the city where we attended their Sunday service. The building in contrast with the other two churches wasn't spectacular but inside the worship hall it was filled with hundreds of worshipers. Many of them, children and young people. Although I didn't understand a word of what was going on, it was in Cambodian, but I enjoyed this choir presentation by their young adults.

For the last example, the fourth example in May 2019 last year my wife and I were in Wuhan, China. Yes Wuhan, ground zero of the COVID-19 pandemic. We were there like six months before the virus was first detected. Anyway, we found this church, Glory Church about 10 minutes walk from our hotel. And we were there Sunday morning for worship service. The auditorium was packed with thousands of worshipers and they ran four such services every Sunday. You may be able to guess why I'm talking about this four churches. Although I realized all this is just anecdotal and I shouldn't be making generalizations, but it appears to me that churches in the poorer under developed or developing countries, they tend to be far more vibrant and doing very well compared to churches in the rich developed world. I just wanted to contrast the state of the church in some parts of the world with other parts of the world.

But what has this got to do with Genesis 25, this tale of four churches. Now we will revisit this later when we come to the application part of the sermon. I will make the connection between what I've just shown you and with what the passage is trying to teach us. Now as I alluded to early on, there are two parallel tracks in the text. One, the account of Jacob and Esau, which we can glean directly from the verses and two, the less apparent theme beneath the verses that will teach us about God and how he relates to his people.

Now, first let's dive into the text and discuss what happened between these twin brothers. We'll pick up some secondary lessons along the way before we uncover the more important lessons when we dig deeper into the text later.

Now, if you look at the whole chunk of texts, there is a clear demarcation across in the middle of the text. We have eight verses on the events leading to the birth of the twins and a further eight verses on what took place when they grew up. Now to make it easier for you to digest the text, I have divided it into five segments.

1. The barrenness of Rebecca.
2. The battle in the womb
3. The birth of the twins.

4. The behavior of the boys.
5. The barter between them, namely the exchange of Esau's birthright for Jacob's bowl of stew.

Now the narrative opens with a problem, a huge problem, Isaac's wife, Rebecca was barren from verse 21. Isaac himself was a child of promise. He was supposed to carry the line from Abraham that will go all the way to Jesus. But now this couple was childless and this went on for 20 years. Verse 20 says that Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebecca. Then if we jump to verse 36 further down we read the Isaac was 60 when his wife gave birth to not one but two sons. So they waited 20 years before they became parents of two baby boys, a long 20 year wait.

Many couples if the wife cannot conceive after 10 years they would have simply given up. Here it is interesting to note that Rebecca's mother-in-law Sarah was also barren from Genesis 16. It's even more interesting to note the Rebecca's daughter in law, Rachel, Jacob's wife later was also unable to conceive from Genesis 29. And so we had three couples over three generations who are all unable to have Children. Abraham and Sarah, and now Isaac and Rebecca and later Jacob and Rachel. We talk about history repeating itself twice here in Genesis.

There is a lesson for us here when we look at the response of each couple to the situation. Genesis 16 says, now Sarai Abram's wife had born him no children, but what does she do? You know? Well, in the next verse, she concocted a plan where she would get her mate Hagar to sleep with her husband and Abraham went along with a plan. And so in their predicament, they took matters into their own hand. Maybe God has forgotten and so they thought of lending got a helping hand instead of trusting in his mighty hand.

You skip one generation and we have another couple, Jacob and Rachel, who was also childless. In Genesis 30 verse one, Rachel became so frustrated that she complained to her husband, Jacob. She said, give me children or I will die. In the next verse, Jacob got angry and told off, "Am I in a place of God who has kept me from having children. In other words, hey, what can I do? So she just brushed her off. So what did Rachel do? She sent her mate Billah to sleep with Jacob, which is exactly what her grandmother-in-law did. Just like what Sarah did, she took matters into her own hands, history repeating itself again. But in our text what did Isaac and Rebecca do in contrast to Abraham and Sarah, and in contrast to Jacob and Rachel. They didn't try to concoct a human plan. Instead in verse 21 Isaac prayed to God and God answered his prayers.

The long 20 year wait surprisingly is squeezed to just one verse. There is no description of disappointment on their part, nothing is written about their feelings. They waited patiently for two decades. Now Isaac must have remembered how God provided a ram to be sacrificed instead of him back in Genesis 22. In addition, I believe Abraham must have often told his son about God's covenant. And so harboring the faith that God would somehow provide and standing on the promises of God Isaac wen to the Lord in prayer. It is not clear how long he prayed, but I believe he must have prayed for the longest time.

The New King James version says that he pleaded with the Lord. The verse is translated as he pleaded with the Lord. He persisted in his prayers. And here the lesson for us is that when we are out of options, when we reach the end of the road with no way out, when we feel like giving up, we can always go to God in prayer. We can always approach the throne of grace and our father in heaven will listen to our prayers. And he also answers our prayers, although not necessarily in the manner that we wish for or in a timing that we prefer. The outcome may not turn out to be what we desire, but God always has our best interest in mind. The Bible exhorts us to pray persistently whatever the outcome. Isaiah 40 verse 31 says,

...those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

You'll be better off in life if you stay in constant prayer contact with God. I repeat if you'd be much better off in life, if you stay in constant contact with God. And so Rebecca became pregnant, but it turned out to be a rather difficult pregnancy. The babies inside her were jostling with each other from verse 22. Some translations say that the babies struggle with each other or the babies pushed against each other. A few translations even put it as the babies fought each other inside the womb. She asked, why is this happening to me? Now in the original Hebrew the meaning of this phrase is rather uncertain. Some translations render this as it's going to be like this, why go on living or I can't endure this. Hence it's likely that Rebecca was in great distress and discomfort. And the thing to note here is that she went to inquire the Lord. Just like her husband, Isaac in the previous verse she prayed for answers from God and God responded to her with a prophecy. In verse 23,

Two nations are in your womb. And two peoples from within you will be separated. One people will be stronger than the other. And the older will serve the younger.

Now what is meant here is that Rebecca was going to give birth to two sons who would each father a nation. And the two nations will be rivals at odds with each other. Later as history unfolds, we see the Esau, the oldest son will be the forefather of the Edomites. Now there's a whole chapter, I think Genesis 36 devoted to the genealogy of Esau. On the other hand, Jacob, the youngest son will be the father to 12 sons from whom came the child tribes of the nation of Israel. The Israelites and Edomites will become bitter enemies. And one example is in Numbers 20 when Moses actually sought permission from the Edomite King at that time for Israelites to pass through Edomite territory on their way North from Sinai to the Promised Land. But the Edomite King refused and threatened to attack the Israelites if they came close.

And so God's people had to take a longer route to Canaan. As for the second part of the prophecy, one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger. This simply means that Jacob would be God's choice to inherit the covenant promise and not Esau. It also means that the Israelites would be God's chosen people and not the Edomites. And also it says one people will be stronger than the other. This means that the Israelites would prevail against the Edomites. And this will be fulfilled in 2-Samuel verse 8 when King David finally subdued the Edomites.

In short, the battle between the baby's inside Rebecca's womb can be seen not only as a foreshadow of the struggle between Jacob and Esau later in the adulthood but it also points to the enmity between the Israelites and the Edomites. The immediate lesson for us here is twofold. One on the macro level and one on the micro. On the macro level, it reminds us that on the world stage in national politics, there has always been a clash between the good and evil, between light and darkness. Often when we look at this situation in our country we lament over, you know, the politics in our country. But we can take comfort in the fact that in God's sovereign plan, good always defeats evil, light always overcomes darkness. Is a matter of time. God will see to that. And what we need to do is to pray from the earlier lesson. Pray persistently that God's will be done on earth.

On the micro level, on a personal level, the battle in the womb can also be taken as a metaphor for the conflict in our hearts. Between doing what is right and what is wrong, between righteousness and sin, between obeying God and displeasing God. In other words, it points to the constant tussle in our hearts between the spirit and the flesh.

Now park this at the back of your mind, because later on, we are going to look at this again. In the meantime, be assured that in this conflict too, in the micro level as in the macro level, we will emerge victorious. You'll be better off in life if you have the confidence that you are on the winning side. Paul writes in 1-Corinthians 15 verse 57,

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

As a matter of fact, this victory, this being on a winning side is ours to claim even right now, we don't have to live a defeated sinful life, but more on this later.

We come to the third segment, the birth of the twins, and true enough as what God told her Rebecca delivered two boys. And in this 14th century, a medieval painting the babies look rather bigger. No wonder Rebecca has such a hard time during her pregnancy. The text immediately goes on to describe the new arrivals. In verse 25, the first to come out was red all over and very hairy, and he was named Esau, but experts in ancient Hebrew language are very certain of the meaning of the name Esau. Some say that it means hairy, but Esau was given another name Edom later in verse 30 and Edom means red.

As for the baby born next, he came up grasping the heel of Esau from verse 26. It must have been quite a sight for the midwife to see this going on. The second baby was like telling the first one, "Hey, you come back, come back in. I'm supposed to be the one to come out first." And hence he was given the name, Jacob, which means heel grabber. And interestingly, the Hebrew phrase to grab someone's heel means to deceive someone. And so the name Jacob means trickster or deceiver, and it turned out to be rather prophetic because this boy grew up to be quite a conniving and cunning character, who had no qualms resorting to deceptions and lies.

He took advantage of his brother and made him sell his birthright, which we shall see shortly. In Genesis 27, he cheated his father into blessing him instead of Esau and this'll be the sermon for next Sunday. And later in Genesis 30, he also swindled his uncle Laban. And so this boy, he deceived his brother, his father and his uncle. Now perhaps the immediate lesson for us here is that maybe we shouldn't give a child a name Jacob. I mean, if you know the meaning behind the name, Jacob. Sorry, I am just joking, otherwise all the parents of boys named Jacob will come after me. Jacob is a good name okay. I mean it okay. Because it connotes someone whom God renews or transforms, because later on this will happen later in Jacob's life. Jacob's story is a story of renewal but that is not part of today's sermon, is for another sermon.

Now, as the boys grew up their character or behavior turned out to be so different and complete opposites. When they were born, their appearances were very different. The elder was hairy while the younger one had smooth skin. Now Jacob's skin being smooth is not mentioned in our text, but in the Genesis 27 passage otherwise you ask how, you know his skin is smooth. Here not only were they very unlike each other physically their temperaments, their personalities, qualities were poles apart. In verse 27 of the fourth segment Esau is described as the outdoor type. He was a man of the open country, a skillful hunter. Esau is your strong, tough and active kind of guy, someone whom any father would be proud of. Jacob on the other hand was the mama's boy, hanging around the house most of the time. Verse 27 in some translations describes him as the plain and quiet man. He must have helped around the kitchen a lot, learning how to cook from Rebecca, which may help to explain why he was later able to prepare such a delicious meal that his brother could not resist.

To really understand the twins better, their differences, we should realize that the family was actually rather well to do. In Genesis 13, we read that God had blessed Abraham materially. From Genesis 13 verse 2, he had become

very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold, and in verse 5 of chapter 25, which is outside of our text, it is recorded that Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. And so Isaac was a very, very rich man. The family had large herds of cattle and sheep and goats. So why did Esau go hunting? Certainly not to make a living or to look for food. He didn't have to do that because they had plenty of livestock. Esau went hunting because he loved to. He did it for recreation as a sport. Another possible reason why he hunted is because he wanted to please his father. Because day and day out Isaac had been eating beef and mutton, every day beef and mutton, beef and mutton, until you got so fed up, and so he yearned for more exotic meat and verse 28 says that Isaac had a taste for wild game.

So in a way, Isaac was very Chinese, because the Chinese love wild animal meat. They have wild animal markets all over China. Most famous of them is in Wuhan, which is believed to have triggered the pandemic. We didn't visit the market because nobody knew at that time. Besides, as you know, we went to church. Now, here I have a quiz for you. This is the painting I showed earlier in the opening slide. You see Esau taking, you know, that bowl of stew and Jacob, you know, quickly stretching his scent out. Not so fast, birthright, birthright.

Now the quiz is like this, can you find something wrong with this painting? Something is not right here. Can you point it out? Now some of you may say, Oh, Rebecca, shouldn't be in the painting, which is true because when Esau sold his birthright to Jacob later in the text, nowhere is mentioned that the mother was there. The artist must have painted Rebecca to symbolically show that she was such an influence in Jacob's life. She was the one coaching him, and you can see the look of approval on her face, but that's not the answer. What is the answer? Anyone? The answer is the rabbit that Esau is holding. What? The rabbit. You see in Leviticus 11 verse 6, there is a specific and strict prohibition against eating rabbit meat. If you like to eat rabbit meat, look up Leviticus 11:6, rabbits were considered unclean and Isaac wouldn't touch rabbit meat.

I see the artist didn't know his Bible well, so what animal did Esau hunt to please his father? What meat did Isaac crave to eat? In some translations the term wild game in verse 28 is translated as venison. Isaac loved deer meat. Sorry for the digression, talking about eating meat. Let's continue with Jacob. We are talking about the differences between the twins now because the family had large herds of cattle and sheep and goats, I don't imagine Jacob hanging around the kitchen all day. Rather imagine him learning to manage the families' assets. I imagine him supervising the servants to care for the livestock. While his brother is, was out there enjoying himself hunting. Jacob concerned himself with duties and responsibilities or Esau occupied himself with what was pleasurable to him and here is the immediate lesson for us. You'd be better off in life if you pursue first the more important things over the less important. You would be better off in life if you pursue first the more important things over the less important. Don't busy yourself with the less important things in life at the expense of the important ones. And this includes matters pertaining to family relationship to maintenance of your health and especially your walk with God.

And because Isaac enjoyed so much the venison that Esau brought to him he loved Esau while Rebecca loved Jacob. So says verse 28, each parent favored one child over the other. There were two camps in the house. Some Bible teachers use Genesis 25 to teach about the dangers of parental favoritism, which is fine of course, but it's also missing the point. My wife likes to ask me this trick question between the daughter and the son whom do you love more? How to answer and I shake my head. My politically correct answer is I love both of them equally, but somehow she doesn't believe me. Any way let me declare no parents should practice favoritism towards the children. I don't practice favoritism and so I just leave it at that because there is another more important point in this part of the text for me to cover.

You see, I'm baffled by Isaac's actions. I mean, Rebecca, the wife must have told him many times that Jacob, Jacob was God's choice to inherit the covenant promise, not Esau but this guy is still thought that Esau should be the one. So why did he act against the grain of God's will. Maybe he felt sorry for Esau. Jacob was God's choice. Jacob was the mother's favorite, so I better love Esau, otherwise poor thing, but I don't think that was the case because in Genesis 27, Isaac actually planned to bless Esau as the firstborn. He actually wanted Esau to receive the covenant promise. He failed only because Jacob and Rebecca cheated him. And this is subject for the next Sunday sermon.

I'm at a loss to explain why Isaac did what he did. Maybe it was the venison. No, Rebecca was the smarter one. She aligned herself with God's choice. Wives are always smarter, another politically correct statement. In any case, here is an immediate lesson for us. Blessed is the man who lives his life in sync with God's plan and not contrary to God's plan. You'll be better off in life if your actions are aligned with God's will, otherwise God might force you back on his track and that might be painful.

And coming to the last segment of the text, the barter between the twins, namely the exchange of a birthright for a bowl of stew. What kind of a stew. Verse 34 says it was lentil stew. And lentil is what you get when the serve your dhal to go with your roti cinai. Dhal is lentil. And it's also in verse 30 that it was a bowl of red stew. I don't know why the stew was red. Maybe Jacob had a lot of tomatoes and chili. In any case, you know the story well. Esau came back from his day of hunting and he was very tired and very hungry and when he saw that bowl of lentil stew, it was irresistible. He must have it quick. Let me have some of that red stew, I'm famished. Jacob was indeed quick, but quick to see Esau's moment of weakness as an opportunity for himself. Verse 31,

Jacob replied first sell me your birthright

And to ensure that the transaction was binding on Esau, Jacob demanded in verse 33, swear to me first to which Esau agreed and in doing so he unwittingly passed his birth right to his brother Jacob. The heel grabber who was born second, finally appended the one born first. Now to be fair to Jacob he didn't actually deceived Esau, but he took advantage of his not so smart brother. His motives were not pure, although Esau was a consensual party to this lopsided deal. Although it was, as we say, a case of willing buyer, willing seller. However, the larger question is didn't Esau recognize or understand the value of what he was signing away. Was he such a gullible person?

Birthright was a big deal in those days. It meant a double portion of the inheritance, double of what the next one getting. It also meant leadership of the family that came with privileges and authority. Now to say that Esau wasn't aware of the value of his birthright will be rather incredulous. He knew, but he was willing to give it up to satisfy his stomach. It was a desire for the instant gratification of the flesh. It was based on an attitude of, "I want it now" and it was a continuation of what we saw earlier. This careless disregard for what is important and here again lies an immediate lesson for us.

You'll be better off in life if you can control the appetite of the flesh and not let it control you. Realize the dangers of instant gratification, which can cost you dearly. Understand the benefits of delayed gratification. In other words, instead of saying, I want it now, we say I can wait. Remember those who wait upon the Lord shall soar like Eagles.

Our texts ended on a sad note. At the end of verse 34,

So Esau despised his birthright

It's so tragic and just before this phrase, it says that Esau got up and left. He didn't just leave he left behind a glorious future that could have been his. Time and again, I've seen people who hears the gospel but they choose to walk away, not realizing that they're also walking away from spiritual inheritances that could have been theirs and it is sad to see that happen especially if that person is someone dear to you.

Now, I have one last point to make on this verse. It is evident to me that Esau walked away out of his own volition. He walked away out of his own freewill, nobody forced him and in doing so he affirmed God's sovereign choice of Jacob. God already chose. Jacob. You may ask if God has already made up his mind, who can resist this will? How can they be free will on our part? In the debate between predestination and free will, we think that these two are mutually exclusive, but yet in this verse we see predestination and free will happening at the same time, side by side.

God's sovereign choice of Jacob and Esau's willful rejection of his birthright, they were in play simultaneously. They are two sides of the same coin. Well, we have finished our detailed examination of the text. We have picked up several secondary lessons along the way. I say secondary, because we are going to look at the main lessons from Genesis 25 right away after this. But just before that, here's a summary of what we have learned under the heading. You'd be better off in life...

1. You'd be better off in life, if you stay in constant prayer contact with God and I trust that you all lead an active prayer life.
2. You'd be better off in life if you have the confidence that you're on the winning side, and I trust that you also lead a victorious life of faith.
3. You'd be better off in life if you pursue first the more important things over the less important. Get your priorities right, especially on spiritual matters.
4. You'd be better off in life if your actions are aligned with God's perfect will. Don't go against the grain of God's plan.
5. You'd be better off in life if you can control the appetite of the flesh and not let it control you.

Now we come to the concluding part of the sermon. This time we will dig deeper into the text to discover two underlying lessons. Now, the biggest question hanging over a text is why did God chose Jacob over Esau. When we talk about the sovereign choice of God in the person of Jacob, but why Jacob over Esau? What was the basis of his choice of Jacob and God later affirm his decision when he spoke through his prophet Malachi. In Malachi chapter 1, which is quoted by Paul in Romans 9, God spoke

Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated.

This is very strong language, but don't take this to mean the usual emotions of love and hate. Hebrew is a much, much older and deeper language compared to English. What's this simply means is that Jacob was God's choice and not Esau. Still what did Jacob do so that he was selected? What did Esau do so that he was rejected? The answer is nothing. Nothing they did or would do mattered. And so the main point of the text, if you look deeper is to illustrate that God's sovereign choice is not based on any merits that we may have. It is not conditional on who we are, what we are, what we have done. If based on human logic, the natural choice would have been Esau. He was the first born. He was a stronger between the two. Besides Jacob would have been a poor choice. He was cunning and conniving.

So through these verses, God is saying to us, you have been chosen, not because of your position. If it is Esau would have been chosen, he was the first born. Not because of your goodness. If it is Esau would have been chosen, he was not deceitful like Jacob. Not because of your talents or skills, because if it is Esau would have been chosen. He was a skillful Hunter. Human qualities like position, goodness, skills are not the criteria for salvation. In other words, in the dynamics of God's salvation, our attributes or merits count for nothing. God doesn't take any of these into account.

So what we can really learn from the text is the manner in which we came into salvation. We are called not because of our social status, not our morality, not our intellect or anything that we might boast about. How then will we call into God's kingdom if not based on merits? The answer is grace. It is because of God's grace that we've been saved. So grace is unmerited favor given to someone who doesn't deserve. It is a gift to a person who shouldn't be receiving the gift. The gospel of Jesus Christ is about the good news of God's grace and Paul puts this very nicely in Ephesians 2:9,

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not yourselves. It is the gift of God. It is not from works so that no one can boast.

I know, you know this well. The reason why I'm trying to drive this home is because many of us still think that we are somehow worthy of God's salvation that there is something about us that qualifies us. You may argue. I don't think like that, but I believe at a subconscious level this idea still lurks in our mind. And let me demonstrate this. Let me show you some pictures. Take a good look at these people. What is our reaction when we see these people? We say thank God I am not like that, I'm better than them. I don't identify with them, and that's how we think maybe at a subconscious level. But what if I tell you that in God's eyes we are no different from them in terms of qualification, because there is none of us are qualified. Not us, not them. And God may call them the way he called you and me. And all of us, including these people come to the throne of grace, empty handed without merits. Otherwise it's a salvation by works, and Paul wrote not by works so that no one can boast.

And hence our response to this crucial lesson from the text should be one of humility, humility before God and men. There's nothing to shout about, nothing to boast about. We keep our heads low and speak softly, figuratively speaking. And this is where illustrated by the words of the song, who am I sang beautifully by Leanne just now. Not because of who I am, not because of what I've done, but because of who he is because of what he has done. Many years later in Jacob's life, as I told you, Jacob's life is a life of renewal later and later he himself said this, something to this effect. In Genesis 32, he told God.

I'm worthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant.

And this is the posture that we should assume throughout our Christian life. When I attended the churches in Perth and Phnom Penh and Wuhan, I was sitting among the congregation and who do I see? I see worshipers from all walks of life. There were rich people. There were poor people. There were young people. There were old people. There were tall people. There were shorter people. It didn't come from one particular social class or a specific income group or a certain demographic. There were people of diverse backgrounds. The only common denominator is that they all recognized that they were sinners saved only by grace. That's who they were, that's who we are.

And finally, after coming into salvation, the next thing is our transformation through the work of the Holy Spirit within us, so that we become more and more Christ like. Now the text not only teaches us about the manner in which we are called, the second underlying lesson within the text relates to this process of transformation and how so, we have seen earlier how the battle between the twins in the womb is a metaphor for a struggle between the spirit and the flesh in our lives. And this struggle continues from the moment we were safe until the day we leave this world. And while that is going on, the text is also trying to warn us to be on guard, to be vigilant, and we saw how Esau went hunting for pleasure instead of concerning himself with the more important matters of life.

Now, I'm nothing against hunting. If you enjoy hunting, go hunting by all means or fishing or catching butterflies. But the text is pointing to the dangers of pursuing pleasure for its own sake. If that pleasure, mostly physical pleasure, is slowly becoming an end in itself then alarm bells should start to ring. And when they happen, when it happens, we are allowing the flesh to control us and earlier we learned about the dangers of letting the flesh control us. When the flesh ends up controlling us, it can be very costly to us in spiritual terms. And that's what we see happen when Esau saw his brothers lentil stew and he couldn't resist the urge to satisfy himself immediately, to the extent that he was willing to give up his birthright.

And so this second big lesson from the text teaches us not to feed the flesh to the degree of allowing it to control us and this feeding of the flesh can be a real struggle in our life, because it is compounded by the attractions of the world. We are pulled left and right by what we see around us and to finish the sermon, I'm not suggesting that Christians should deny themselves totally the pleasures of life. If you enjoy having a good meal by all means, if you love to travel go right ahead. So, if you would like to travel, you like to eat go ahead. Just don't let these things control you. Don't let them be an end in themselves. If or when that happens, you risk losing the battle between the spirit and the flesh and to underscore the dangerous of feeding the flesh, that's why I started the sermon with the tale of the four churches. You see when a society becomes affluent, when lives become so good, people start to crowd their lives with pleasurable activities. The increase in the affluence of the society is often accompanied by a corresponding rise in godlessness, in secular secularism and in atheism. And they start to abandon God.

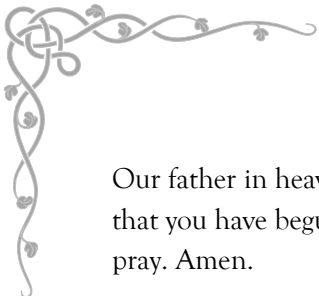
The UK and Australia are very wealthy countries. But this chart shows the trend of church attendance in the UK over a period of 35 years until 2015. And the rate of decrease is nothing short of alarming. And hence, it's no surprise that the church I tried to attend in London was closed. It's no surprise that the church in Perth was so poorly attended. At the same time, it didn't surprise me that a church in Phnom Penh or Wuhan was vibrant and alive. Brother Merrill in a recent letter shared the lyrics of a hymn

I'm resolved no longer to linger,
 charmed by the world's delight,
 things that are higher,
 things that are nobler, these have allured my sight.

These words are echoes of Paul's exaltation in 2-Corinthians 14.

So we fix our eyes on not what is seen, but what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary and what is unseen is eternal.

May the text from Genesis 25 teach us to be humble and to value our high calling into God's kingdom, which was made possible only because of his amazing grace. Let the texts also guide us not to jeopardize or to minimize this calling, as we remain constantly on guard against the power of the flesh. Shall we close in prayer?

A decorative, light gray vine with small leaves and a circular knot at the top left corner of the page.

Our father in heaven, may your word resonate in our hearts and minds and may your spirit continue the good work that you have begun in us and carry it to completion on the day of Christ Jesus your son for it is in his name we pray. Amen.