

1—what needless pain I bear

SERIES Resting in God's Promises: Jacob's journey

KEY TEXTS—GENESIS 25:19-28:9, ROMANS 9:8, 16 & HEBREWS 12:16

HOW WE CREATE OUR OWN PAIN

Some of the pain I carry within my heart may sometimes be the consequences trying to manipulate people and circumstances around me—for reasons I think are godly.

- Trying to engineer who is elected or not elected—resulting in frustration when plans don't work out or you are exposed as a manipulator that damages your reputation.
- Someone comes looking for advice in a difficult situation and without much thought, we jump in with our own version of what we think God's will is for someone. The other person may take offence at what we shared, or they follow it, and everything ends in a disaster.

So one of our greatest challenges in life is learning that we do not need to manipulate circumstances for God's will to be done. In fact, rest comes by getting out of God's way.

GOD'S PROMISES FULFILLED GOD'S WAY

Consider God's repeated promise made to Isaac's father, Abraham, "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:3). This promise was fulfilled through God's miraculous intervention when He enabled Sarah to have a child in her old age (Genesis 18:10). Now, Isaac's wife is childless and she gives birth only after divine intervention (Genesis 25:21). But Rebecca is bothered by the babies in her womb so she goes to ask God why this is happening,

The Lord said to her, "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." (Genesis 25:23)

From the moment Esau is born with Jacob grasping his older brother's heel (Jacob means, 'he grasps the heel' an idiom for 'he deceives'), God's promise / prediction to Rebecca about these two children becomes a source of pain to the whole family.

1— PAIN FROM CARELESSNESS

Esau's pain came from caring too little about God's promises—which caused him to live frivolously. Read Genesis 25:27-34.

Jacob knew what God had promised his mother, so how would this be accomplished? He decided to negotiate for Esau's birthright at a moment of Esau's weakness. You can also imagine Esau growing up being told that God has decided that he is going to serve his younger brother. This must have irked him and coloured his judgement. Later, in a moment of extreme hunger, he exclaims, "Look, I am about to

die, what good is a birthright to me?" (The way the text reads next emphasises Esau selling his birthright—rather than Jacob buying it—and also that Jacob had been waiting for such an opportunity).

the importance of a birthright

Normally, a birthright gave the firstborn a double portion of the inheritance from his father. Most importantly, there was a divine significance because the firstborn son was dedicated to God and was to devote himself completely to God. But Esau deliberately chose to disconnect himself from his godly responsibilities, privileges and blessings. Thus, the author of Hebrews warns,

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. (Hebrews 12:16)

Godless to be secular, showing spiritual things with contempt.

To meet a present and urgent passion (hunger) Esau gave away God's eternal blessings because he did not consider them important. "So Esau despised his birthright." (v34).

Esau's contempt for spiritual things spread to other areas. He would have heard many times God led Abraham's servant to find a wife for his father Isaac among God-believing people. But Esau deliberately chooses to ignore this godly wisdom for himself, and at the end of the next chapter, we find Esau marrying pagan women, "When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah." (Genesis 27:34-35)

Failing to value things of spiritual significance will inevitably send me on a course that will bring pain both to myself and to those who I love dearly.

2—PAIN FROM MANIPULATING EVENTS

Isaac, Rebecca and Jacob's pain came from caring too much about God's promises—which prompted them to take matters into their own hands.

manipulating circumstances

- **Isaac** is well aware of God's announcement to his wife that Esau will serve Jacob. Yet, Isaac organises a blessing for Esau secretly (Genesis 27:1-5)
- **Rebecca** schemes with Jacob to deceive her husband (Genesis 27:5-10) She is so desperate for Jacob to

succeed that she is willing to receive a curse (Genesis 27:11-13)

- **Jacob** still goes ahead with the plan, though apparently reticently when he raises the matter of being found out and cursed with his mother (Genesis 27:11-13).

pain from manipulating

- **Isaac** never saw his son Jacob again. He had to live with an angry son at home and rebuild trust with a deceitful wife.
- **Rebecca** Never saw her favourite son again. She had to live with the knowledge she had deceived her husband and brought great pain to him in his old age. She was the root of the alienation from her other son, Esau, with her life made "unbearable" by Esau's choice to marry pagan wives—apparently because he was angry.
- **Jacob** had to leave home and was in continuous fear his life. He lost decades or relationship with his brother and never saw his mother and father again.

While Esau was angry about God's announcement of the future and became bitter towards God, Isaac, Rebecca and believed that they had to rely on their own cunning to make God's will a reality—but as they understood it.

LEARNING TO TRUST GOD'S PROVIDENCE

But how should they have all responded in this situation? In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul refers to this story in Romans 9:10-14, 16.

Paul is saying this: God's promises are fulfilled not because you are good, or because you want something really badly, or because you work with great effort and sweat, but because of God's choice to bless you—which is driven by His mercy.

implication

This means that God's will is fulfilled in your life because of God's own choice, so there is nothing you can do to

influence or manipulate circumstances around you, to accomplish what God has already promised to do!

application for Isaac's family

There was no reason for Esau to be angry that God had chosen Jacob. He was angry because his pride was hurt as the eldest son, and that pride led to him dismissing spiritual things. Just because God had chosen to bless Jacob did not exclude Esau. Had Esau remained faithful to God, he would have received God's blessing, but through a different route than the one he calculated.

Everything fell apart for Rebecca and Jacob because in their small world, they had concluded that God's promise of Jacob's leadership could only be accomplished by stealing the birthright. But who said God had to use that method for choosing Jacob?

application for us

One of our severest lessons comes from the stubborn refusal to see that we must not interfere in other people's lives. It takes a long time to realise the danger of being an amateur providence, that is, interfering with God's order for others." (Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost*, Nov. 15)

When we think that God's promises will only be accomplished by our own scheming, we will generally find ourselves working against God, and that normally results in pain. God rarely works as we expect. This means we can often expect God's will to be accomplished in our lives in ways that may look strange or unfamiliar. But when this happens, we are not called intervene, but to trust God's promises of grace.

MY RESPONSE

- Not to lose sight of spiritual priorities because I feel hurt by the way God's providence is working out
- To stop trying to interfere in other people's lives, thinking I am doing God's work
- To rest in the knowledge that God's will be accomplished in God's way, in God's timing.

1

LIFE POINT

God's promises are fulfilled in God way

2

LIFE POINT

God will often work in ways that don't make sense to me

3

LIFE POINT

Pain may result if I am certain about what God is doing, when He is not

4

LIFE POINT

I am called to rest, and find peace, in God's Providence