

Jacob - Gods Unchanging Grace - Genesis 25 - Sermon 1 of 5

by Roy Hession

The sermon explores the theme of unchanging grace through the life of Jacob, demonstrating God's love and favor towards us, even when we are undeserving.

Duration: 49:26

Scripture: Genesis 3:15, Genesis 25:19, Genesis 25:21-22, Matthew 6:33, Romans 11:29

Topics: "Grace"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on his own journey of being chosen by God and the impact it had on his life. He emphasizes that when God calls someone, it is part of a pre-existing plan. The speaker then references Romans 8:28 and discusses how the grace of God guided the life of Jacob, even before he was born. The sermon concludes with a reading from Genesis 25:19, highlighting Isaac's prayer for his barren wife and the struggle of their children within her.

Transcript

Jacob. The Bible gives us the whole life story of this man from the cradle right up to old age and on to the grave. And we're going to trace together how the grace of God began with this man, even if you please, before he was born.

Of how that grace never let him down and never gave him up, in spite of all that that man so often was. And of how ultimately the grace of God made that man what God wanted him to be. And as a token of that fact, he had his name changed from Jacob to Israel.

Our theme then, if you want to write it over the whole story of Jacob, is unchanging grace. And that phrase comes from that hymn on Christ the solid rock I stand. One line of which runs, when darkness seems to hide his face, I rest on his unchanging grace.

And we want to see that unchanging grace to people no better than we are. And we want to know how to rest on that unchanging grace. And how to let the Lord Jesus Christ, who is both the revelation and the channel of that grace, achieve all he wants to do through us, for us and through us.

It says in Romans 11 29, the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. Do you know what that means? The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. Does that mean we don't have to repent? No,

it doesn't.

To repent means to change your mind. And it means that God doesn't change his mind. The gifts and calling of God for you and me are without any change of mind on his part.

God could well have said, well, I think I'll finish with that fellow. I think, well, lay him aside, he's just so much of a disappointment. The grace of God doesn't say that.

Grace wouldn't be grace if it did. It doesn't alter when it alteration finds. And that's the grace that God has for each one of us.

It's an unchanging grace. God began by taking the initiative with us as he did with Jacob. And unless he continues to take the initiative, there's no hope for any of us.

We'll soon peter out. So this is something of the background theme, if you like, that we shall see as we look at this man, Jacob. This morning, I want us to read the appropriate passage that deals with God's beginnings with this man.

Genesis chapter 25, verse 19. And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son. And Abraham begat Isaac.

And Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel, the Syrian, of Paddan Aaron, the sister to Laban, the Syrian. And Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord was entreated of him.

And Rebekah, his wife, conceived. And the children struggled together within her. And she said, if it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the Lord.

And the Lord said unto her, two nations are in thy womb. Those two nations that struggle together in the womb of Rebekah are still struggling together in the Middle East, are they not? Two nations are in thy womb. And two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels.

The one people shall be stronger than the other people. And the elder shall serve the younger. And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold there were twins in her womb.

And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment. And they called his name Esau. And after that came his brother out.

And his hand took hold on Esau's heel. And his name, as a result of that incident, was called Jacob. And the margin tells us it means, one that takes by the heel, or supplants.

And Isaac was three score years old when she bared him. And the boys grew. And Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field.

And Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison. But Rebekah loved Jacob.

Each had their favorites. What a terrible thing, and what trouble it caused. Now the life of Jacob is recorded in the Bible, not merely to give us an interesting biography of a man.

Not merely to tell us of God's dealings with him. This man, Jacob, holds a unique place in the divine story, indeed in the history of the world. Way back after the fall of man, God gave the first ray of gospel hope to man.

When he said to Adam and Eve, that Eve would have her seed. And that God would put enmity between her seed and that of the serpent. And he said, he said that her seed would bruise the serpent's head.

But in the process, his own seed, his own heel, would be bruised. That, you understand, is the very first glimmer of the gospel. And the Bible is about one thing only.

It is doing nothing more than picking on Genesis 3.15, one of the most important texts in the Bible, and tracing it through. The red cord begins there, and doesn't end to, till you get to the book of Revelation. That's all the Bible's about.

Absolutely nothing else. There are other things it treats with, all sorts of history, but they're merely the backdrop to the tracing out of redemption. God doesn't really begin till things go wrong.

He has to tell us about the creation. He has to tell us about the fall and sin of man, only to give us to understand what he's about now. And it's nothing more than redemption.

Redemption is not a part of the divine story, it is the divine story. And there was the first promise. And so, as we turn the pages of Genesis, we see that red cord of redemption running through it.

There's going to be a seed then, isn't there? That's going to crush the serpent's head, and undo all the damage that the serpent has done in the human race. Perhaps he thought that it was her next son. Okay, I've gotten a man from the law, that's what his name means.

Perhaps this is going to be the seed, but he wasn't. What a disappointment. And then in due course, it was made clear that this coming seed, which was going to be God's deliverer for men, was to come through Abraham.

He was to leave his country to have a multitudinous seed, and that from that multitudinous seed, one day one would come in whom all nations of the earth should be blessed. It was simply a case of God choosing the minority to bless the majority. And if Abraham was singled out for this honour, it wasn't a plum given to Abraham.

God's eyes were on the world. And will you understand that when you find that God is choosing you and giving you special sphere of influence? It's not a plum for you, it's men that he's after. And he's got to have somebody, and sometimes he picks out a man or a few in order to bless the majority.

And so Abraham was chosen. But then Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, which are them two. And it's clear the promise is then transferred not to Ishmael, but to Isaac.

And then Isaac himself had two sons, Jacob and Esau, which is it. And as we read the story together, we shall find it's Jacob. And so he is the father of that nation from whom ultimately the Lord Jesus Christ came.

And I believe God, according to his word, has still a great and glorious future for that nation that came from the loins of Jacob. His name, as you know, was called Israel. And his children, his nation is called the children of Israel.

And therefore they're never very far from recognizing the place of Jacob. He's an important figure. And even today we call that nation Israel.

And this is the man from whom that nation began. Quite obviously then he's an important figure in the history of God's story and in the history of the world. And so in the story that we shall read of God's dealings with this individual man, we must see that God had a larger plan in view than merely that man's blessing.

God's got the world in view, a glorious purpose of redemption, and this man is going to fit into a vital part of it. And therefore God chooses him and deals with him. And you know, so it is with us, in God's choice of us, in God's continual patient dealings with us, he always has a wider plan in view.

It's not merely that we should be helped, not merely that we should be saved, not merely that we should be comforted and set free from our problems. God's got something bigger in mind. He blesses me in order that something larger that I might have little idea of should happen, that others should likewise be helped.

And that goes for every man. Now I've said that what I think is demonstrated in God's dealings with Jacob is God's unchanging grace. Perhaps it should be important, in fact it should be right, to make quite clear that we understand what is meant by the grace of God which was demonstrated in his dealings with Jacob.

The grace of God is one of the elements in the divine character, and it is quite clear it is that element in the divine character which is most glorious. It is the brightest gem, if you like, in the divine crown, the grace of God. It is this which causes perhaps the angels to wonder and worship more than anything else.

God in his creation is wonderful, but God seen acting in grace is even more wonderful. What is this element in the divine character? It's akin to the love of God, but not really the same. It is really greater than the love of God.

It's love, but the love of God becomes grace when the object of that love is undeserving, in desperate need, and completely culpable, and morally unattractive. The grace of God is the undeserved love and favour of God. I suppose it isn't true there might be those that God might love.

Perhaps you could say that rich young ruler looking upon him, he loved it. Perhaps there was something about him that Jesus Christ appealed to Jesus Christ. And even in fallen men, there are elements among them that may well appeal to the divine heart.

Well, in that case, you can't call it grace. It's love. Love is only grace when the recipient has nothing in them to attract, has no claim on God for anything, has forfeited everything, but a mess, that's guilty.

Grace, the grace of God, then is for the guilty. Perhaps the one scripture that settles the meaning of this great word more than any other is Romans 11, verse 6. Read verse 5, talking about present-day Israel. Even so, at this present time also, there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

And if by grace, then it is no more of works. Otherwise, grace is no more grace. The moment the element of having to deserve it, having to attain, having to improve first, comes in, grace is no more grace.

Grace is for those that have tried until they've got no more try left and can't improve at all. Grace is for those that got themselves in a jam and it's their own fault. Grace is for those that are down and can't lift

themselves up.

And this is what came by Jesus Christ. The law came by Moses and condemned the lot of us. Something other than the call to duty came by Jesus Christ.

Something other than the call to try harder came by Jesus Christ. Grace for the guilty, along with it, the searching light of truth. But even truth is as much opposite to law as grace is.

Something terribly restful about the truth, when the Lord shows you what you are. Whereas I agree, Lord, that's what I am. What can a man like me do? Nothing at all, he says.

That's what I want. So even truth is as much opposed to law as grace is. Grace and truth in a perfect blending has come by Jesus Christ.

We can say then that the grace of God is that love towards man which is undeserved, uncalled for. Sometimes I've felt that someone was acting almost too generously. I don't think that's altogether called for, to do this and that for that person.

I've sometimes fought in my mean heart. You know what I mean? You do something uncalled for. That's what grace does for man.

That which is undeserved, that which is completely uncalled for, and so often that which is completely unexpected. This is the God we adore. This is the God that emptied heaven to his beloved son.

While we were still enemies, still enemies, and still sinners, without any sign of improvement, God loved men in their sin, was not thwarted by their sin, and planned a redemption which none of us deserved at all. And the grace that planned that redemption is the grace that's got us right up to our dying day and is going to continue. And as I say, this unchanging grace that doesn't alter when it alteration finds, is demonstrated I think in the life of Jacob.

Now where did this grace begin with Jacob? It may surprise you to know that this grace began before he was born. We read the story of that mother who found twins in her womb, and they were struggling. The one was Esau, the one was Jacob.

And when she asked God what it meant, he said, there are two nations in your womb, two manner of people are going to come forth from you, and one of them is going to be stronger than the other. And the elder whom you thought would be the stronger isn't going to be the stronger. The elder shall serve the younger.

And the younger as the event proved, was Jacob. And Jacob was chosen and appointed to his place even before he was actually born. Well, that's grace, isn't it? Romans 9.11 says he hadn't done any evil to forfeit the favor of God, nor any good to deserve it.

Look at that. Romans 9.11, that's the point that is made in Paul's epistle. Romans 9.11, the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God, according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth, it was said unto her, the elder shall serve the younger.

And therefore, this man's place in the divine story wasn't a hastily thought up scheme on the part of the deity as to what they could do with this young boy. It was thought out and planned, and he was loved and chosen, and made the object of grace before he was actually born. And when ultimately God made that

first appearance of himself to Jacob at Bethel, it was in pursuance of a choice of him, and a plan made for him long before.

This is where grace began with this man. And this is where grace begins with us. It didn't begin with that day with me, on the seafront at Southwold, when I walked up and down after that meeting, and I said, Lord Jesus, if you've never come in before, come now.

As I look back, my conversion to Christ really was inevitable. I was hedged in. I was made for this.

I didn't take the initiative, he did. I didn't seek and seek until I found him. What I did was to run and run away from him, and he caught me up.

Isn't that great? But why did he take that trouble? Because he'd planned something for me, as well as for you, long before. You know, when we talk about these things, we talk about our consciousness of the grace of God, and God's choice of us, each individually. But the extraordinary thing is, every saint of God can say the same, who's been given any revelation or understanding of the ways of God.

When you stand on the front, one moonlit night, and there's the moon, it will seem to you as if the moonbeams come across the water, right to your feet, as if it's shining just for you. But the other fellow, 10 yards up, he's perfectly convinced that that moon is shining just for him, and so it is for everybody. And this grace of God, this love of God, every saint says, I don't understand it, I've been just selected, I've just been chosen, there's a plan made for me.

Long before time began, says Beverly Shea's song, you were part of this plan. You were thought of, you were planned for, you were loved. And when at last Jesus came to you, and you made your choice, it seemed you had to choose, and you did.

The fact he came to you, was in pursuance of a plan made for you and me, long before. Let us look at some of the scriptures. Ephesians 1.4 is one that will come to many people's minds.

Ephesians 1.4, according as he hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Fought of, loved, planned for, before the foundation of the world. Now let me say certain things about this choice of us, because it's important, and I want to be helpful and not arouse difficulties in your mind.

Will you notice you were chosen in Christ? You weren't chosen as a sinner. You were a sinner, but you were chosen as one for whom Christ died. Even before time began, the Lamb was, sin was anticipated, and the Lamb was slain for sin.

And you owe your very, those very plans that God made to you, to the precious blood of the Lord Jesus. Only in Christ, only because there was going to be a Christ. In fact there wasn't going to be, there was! This was the thing, was there going to be an elect people.

You know what I think? That what God's doing is something, is simply saving something out of the wreckage. Some people say, isn't it extraordinary that so, so few people are saved? It isn't extraordinary to me. The wonder to me is that any are saved at all.

Only mighty grace could do it. In C.S. Lewis's book, there's three extraordinary novels of his, allegorical novels, *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Voyage to Venus*, and that *Hideous Strength*. The hero of his novel gets in touch with the angels, and he seems to suggest that each of the planets has the Eldola, his own

particular brand of Eldola, watching over it.

And he gets taken to Mars, and these Eldola are wanting to know what's happened to Earth. It's gone silent. These Eldola have communication from one planet to another, over which they preside, but not from Earth.

Something's happened. The bent one has done something. It's gone silent, and they want to know what's happened.

And above all, they want to know if Mal-Eldu, the word for God, has done anything about it. You and I have got no conception of the absolutely coup d'etat that Satan has accomplished in our world. When I went to India, when I faced Hinduism, a deep philosophical religion that antedates Christianity, and Islam too, I was astonished that anybody could ever be saved at all.

And when I've seen the machinations of Satan with young people in our country, how he turns them to think that Jesus is not their friend but their enemy, that to come to him is the worst thing that could happen, that he's the source of all their psychological mix-ups. One young man said to me, I wouldn't be in this state I am. I wouldn't be going to psychiatrist if I hadn't been brought up in a Christian home, come to Christ, why he's the cause of it.

When I think of things like that, the astonishing thing is that any are saved at all. I'm not amazed how few, but how many. He's saving something out of the wrecking, and he could only do it because of Jesus, that Lamb who shed his blood to set the guilty captives free.

And this, of course, we're told this choice of us is obviously utterly of grace. Lord Jesus, what didst thou find in me that thou hast dealt so lovingly? Well, I mean, when the first thought of you was made, you hadn't done anything wrong to forfeit the blessing of God, nor any good to have achieved it. How utterly out of place is any pride.

Nor have I gotten but what I received. Grace hath bestowed it since I believed. Grace bestowed it before I believed.

And here you have it in 2 Timothy 1.9. 2 Timothy 1.9, who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ, with Christ, before the foundation of the world. So I say those two things. First of all, those plans that were made for us and choice of us was only because of Jesus.

Secondly, it was altogether of grace. And thirdly, I believe the emphasis that this choice of us is much more to service than to salvation. You see, if you get your eyes on this, you'll get the comfort and encouragement that you should get.

If it's only salvation, you can't help but say, what about those that are not chosen? That's an old one. I might try and say something about it. I don't know whether I'll remove that difficulty entirely.

But the real emphasis, again and again, and especially the practical one, is I've been chosen for a purpose, for a work. In Acts chapter 9, I haven't got the verse, but when Paul was converted on the road to Damascus, and when God sent Ananias to lay his hands on him that he might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit, God said to Ananias about this hard-fighting Pharisee, he is a chosen vessel unto me. Please turn the cassette over now.

Do not fast-wind it in either direction. God said to Ananias about this hard-fighting Pharisee, he is a chosen vessel unto me. What for? To bear my name to the Gentiles.

Why did God choose Paul, or Saul? In order that he might go to heaven? Incidental. That he might have a man to forward into new areas this work of redemption. To bear my name to the Gentiles.

The same is true of Jeremiah, Jeremiah 1.5. He was chosen and planned for, as Jacob was. But it was service, more than merely his own comfort. In fact, he didn't have much comfort out of it.

He had many tears. And Jeremiah 1.5, God says to him, before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee. And before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee.

And what? I ordained thee a prophet unto the nation. Dear one, these moonbeams come right to you. It isn't only to somebody who preaches and goes around in some special form of service.

You're chosen. You've been laid hold of for a work. As that old hymn says, there's a work for Jesus.

None but you can do, because it's the only, you're the only one who's been planned to do it. And none of us can tell how thrilling that is. And it's no, there's no greater encouragement for us to follow hard after the Lord, than the exciting thought I've been planned for, by infinite love.

Not merely for my own happiness, but for my usefulness, to serve a divine purpose. Isn't that lovely? That's what Paul meant when he said, I follow after that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended. Oh, young people, this should stop you playing around with sin and compromises, playing with baubles.

After this pretty face and that pretty face, you've been laid hold of, for something immense. I knew I had when I was in my teens, I was saved at 18, and I said, I've got to equip myself for coming days. And I worked in a bank, and every day in the London Underground, from Golders Green station, to the bank station in the city, I was working on Romans, and on the rest.

Underlining my Bible, I had a special edition, it didn't look like a Bible. I don't think I was ashamed, I just, I won't get on with it without people peering. And in the lunch hour, I'd been to Bible school, I'd had my theological training, it was in the London Underground, and little dives where I had my midday meal.

And I tell you, when you have a sense that you've been chosen for something, for others, for God, it really does something to you, and you begin to get ready. You follow after that you might apprehend that for which you've been apprehended. And so it is, and this is the fourth thing I have to say about our election, when God calls us, as he may have done by calling, that's laying hold of us and saving us, it's in pursuance of a plan made before.

Romans 8.28 was quoted to us, but let's look at it, the whole verse, it couldn't be completely quoted yesterday, because its treats are such wide things. Romans 8.28 says, we know that all things work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. You were called according to a purpose in God's mind, before you were called.

For whom he did foreknow, he knew you before, he knew you before. He also did predestinate. What for? Oh, some people predestinated.

You complain about that. No, wait a minute, what are they predestinated for? To be conformed to the image of his son. Oh, well, I'll let them have that then.

I'm not sure I want that. That's what predestination's for, to make you holy. Oh, but how lovely when you give in to Jesus.

And moreover, whom he did predestinate, then he also called. It's about third in the line, isn't it, this actual calling that we had. And then, whom he called, then he justified.

He declared those to be right who admitted they were wrong. And they did, that was one of the things that happened. And if you haven't done that, you probably aren't saved at all yet, but you can get it right now.

And whom he justified, then he also glorified. In God's purpose, you're already seated in glory, praising him. And so, we see that grace began with this man, way back there.

Well, just a word, I don't profess to answer the obvious question that young Christians may have. Well, what about free will? What about those that haven't chosen? I'm going to give you an old, hoary old illustration. You experienced Christians, forgive it.

It's the old illustration of the door. On the outside, it says, whosoever will may come. And God really means it.

There's nothing up his sleeve. And he works to make you willing. Because some of us are, at the beginning.

But if there's a desire to find your way back to God, and through the door of salvation, you can come. But when ultimately you do get through, and you look back over the door at the back, you see, chosen in Jesus, before the foundation of the world. How do you reconcile those two sides? You can't.

And I beg you, don't try. Hold firmly the responsibility of man, and of your own, to respond to the light of God. And how many warnings there are of men who failed, and missed things, and yet equally hold firmly to the fact that grace has chosen you, and planned, and isn't somehow going to allow your failures to thwart his purposes.

How you reconcile those two sides, I don't know, and I've long since given up trying, but I hold both equally, I hope. Now we move on. This man who, about whom these gracious promises were given in his birth, was born clutching his twin brother's heel, who beat him by about, I don't know, midwives you can tell me how long it wobbly was, between the birth of Esau and Jacob.

But the revised version says he didn't clutch hold, he came forth clutching Esau's heel. And that's the reason why they gave him the name Jacob. They invariably gave a child a name associated with an event when he was born.

And as he was born clutching his brother's heel, they called him a heel clutcher. Jacob, that's what the Hebrew word apparently means, a supplanter, a grabber, trying to get one up on the other person. And that incident, and that name became prophetic of the man himself.

Now, right the way through his life, Jacob lived up to his name, until the grace of God ultimately caught up with him. He was all the time trying to get listened by his own efforts, and his own scheming, and his own plans. What? Grace had already promised him.

Now this is the important thing. Oh, we can easily see that he descended to all sorts of subterfuges, to get the blessing, to get the birthright, and so on. But the real wrong of it was, he didn't have done it at all.

He was already appointed to supremacy and leadership. And though, of course, at first he wouldn't know about it, as he became older, I'm sure that ambitious Rebecca was careful to tell him of that promise, that the elder Esau would serve the younger Jacob. Well, why didn't he let God do what he said he was going to? He didn't.

And this is the deep thing about Jacob. This is what necessitated all the deep dealings with God, with him, that we will see later. He was all the time striving, scheming, planning, worrying, to get on top, to get what he wanted.

Yes, the amazing thing is this, he was better than Esau in this, what he wanted was spiritual things. Esau only wanted earthly things. He was a secular man.

Jacob's put great store on spiritual things. It was that blessing, that birthright, which was a spiritual thing, that Jacob wanted. But he went about it the wrong way.

The arm of flesh, we would call it, trying by his own efforts and schemes. Someone has said, Jacob's first thought, whenever he was in a jam, was a plant, when he needed to be. But he was God's darling, appointed to this place of supremacy, without any regard to his weakness or otherwise.

And this is exactly us. Certainly it's me, and I believe I'm only the same as everybody else. This moonbeam of grace comes right to your feet.

You may not realize it does, you may. You may know all that I've said in your head, but when it comes to it, you and I are acting again and again unworthily, of an air of a promise, as if we weren't Christ. Why should I charge my soul with care? The wealth in every mind belongs to Christ, God's Son on earth, and he's a friend of mine.

But I do charge my soul with care. Yes, he's a friend of mine, and he with me. Let all things share, since all is Christ's, and Christ is mine, why should I have a care? For Jesus is a friend of mine.

We don't see it. We don't see grace to be grace. We feel if we aren't this or that, we can't be blessed.

And we're as ambitious as Jacob was, and not letting God choose for us. Resorting to all sorts of things, at work, in business, in our home, for our children, and in the conduct of our inner Christian life. You wouldn't think we got the Holy Ghost by the resort to self-effort that we normally make.

You wouldn't think that the wealth in every mind, spiritually as well as materially, is ours in the Lord Jesus, beginning in the Spirit. We try to be made perfect by the flesh, with new promises and new attempts, when you don't need to. And this is Jacob.

This is the heart of the man. This is the man that God had to deal with. All those wonderful promises, and yet acting as if they weren't so.

And as with him, so with us. To act in this way is going to do two things for us. It's going to land us in doing things, so often, which to say the least, are not ethical.

The Christian sins are very often not what I call straight sin. They're the product of unbelief. You see, the first week, someone gave a little thing about Samson touching the dead carcass of the lion to get the honey.

As a Nazirite, he wasn't to touch a dead body, but he did want the honey. Therefore he touched the dead body. And you and I compromise and touch the dead body of worldly associations because we want the honey.

We can't trust God to give it to us, unless we act. Nothing will happen. Unless that girl does this, that, and the other, she will never have a boy.

Unless that boy does this and the other, he won't have a girl. And some of the things they do aren't always right, ethical, in business. We can steal a march on the other man, because after all, out in the big wide world, you've got to fend for yourself.

In the big wide world is where Jesus excels. And he's absolutely as much at home in the realm of business and jobs as in church. And oh, the things that you can do that Jacob did.

The dirty, dirty trick of dressing up and pretending to be his brother, to get that final blessing. And that wasn't spiritual, that was material. It was a big portion of the will.

And his mother a party to it, because he didn't realize, didn't take on its face value that he, the younger, would one day have the supremacy. He didn't let God do it. And secondly, it has the effect of landing us into infinite trouble and sorrow.

Because of his striving, his carnal, if you like it, activity, lying to these wonderful promises, he made a lifelong enemy, mercifully not the whole of life, but the 20 years of Esau. And he had to flee for his life. And then by resorting to the same scheming and so on, to counter Laban's scheming, he made an enemy of Laban.

And poor old David, poor old Jacob, found himself between the devil and the deep blue sea. He ought to leave Laban, but that meant going back to Esau. And that, as we shall see, precipitated the greatest and the most important crisis in his life.

But what a jam! And I want to tell you this, you and I have made enemies. You've got enemies, people who criticize you. There's no smoke without fire.

When people come to tell me, or complain of somebody who's finding it difficult, even a wife towards a husband, I always say, now tell me, if they were here, and I was talking to them alone, what do you think they would say about you? Now come on, tell me, what do you think they would say? And slowly it comes out. And I said, is there any truth in that at all? None at all. And why do people have this or that against us? It isn't often straight sin, something quite different.

I remember when we went to Abu Ghairi, and we used to go years ago, when we first went there, I had to make arrangements for the coach excursions with a coaching firm outside the gates of the school. And I wrote, and I thought, well, out in the big wide world, you've really got to look after yourself and strike good bargains. I had lived the sheltered life of an evangelist, though I had once been in a bank, and there's a very sheltered life in a bank, I can tell you, you don't have too many moral decisions to make.

It isn't too easy just to refrain from, as we heard last night, not doing anything about the till. But I'd led a sheltered life, and I thought, out in the big wide world, you've really got to strike a big bargain. So I asked this man for a quotation, and I said, please, in view of our big numbers, we want a nice discount on the price.

And I got a very abrupt letter back, and God convicted me. I saw that you had to be broken even in your dealings with the world. And so I wrote to another firm, and I didn't say anything about a discount at all.

Of course, one was offered without any asking for it. And that man, to whom I first wrote, took some of the guests to the station in his taxi, and he said, you know that there, a man up there, he wants everything for nothing. What did he have against me? What a straight sin.

I wasn't bringing Jesus into the ordinary affairs of life. And oh friend, you've got an ethol, and you've got a layback, and he criticizes you. He's against you.

And you ought to ask, what is he against me? And it may be we acted in a way that was unworthy of an heir of a promise. Unworthy of a darling of heaven, with God before him. Who can be against me? Very quickly as we close, we've seen how grace began with him.

We've seen how he was born clutching Esau's heel, and how that was prophetic and actually fulfilled as a prophecy in his whole life. Secondly, nonetheless, the grace of God never changed towards him. God never thought better of his choice of him.

God did not allow this man's sins and mistakes to thwart his purpose for him and through him. And again and again we shall see them. Extraordinary manifestations of God to this man, speaking sweet promises of comfort, confirming these promises, invariably after he'd acted in a most unworthy way.

At first it almost seems it's hardly moral. You can't start appearing to him and saying, go back after this trouble with Laban to your home, and I will be with thee. Just look what he's done to put Laban against him.

Again and again, what an encouragement. Although you and I prove to be Jacob's, get ourselves into trouble, make enemies to ourselves, and act unworthy as an heir of the divine promises, he doesn't not only let you down, but he doesn't give you up. You know, I think that's helpful.

I know we can swing too far, but one way in which we can swing is be so introspective, that we're all scrutinizing ourselves, and if I put a wrong foot forward or done the wrong thing, I can't be blessed. The gifts of calling of God are without repentance. Your failures, your sins, are not going to be allowed to thwart the divine purpose, and the way in which he's not going to allow them to, is he works in your heart to attend to them.

And nothing encourages me to get right and humble myself as to know, I'm still God's darling. And the last thing is this, grace not only never changed toward him, but grace ultimately made him what God wanted him to be. This man was loved as he was.

But because of that fact, God didn't leave him as he was, but began to deal with him. Yes, if it wasn't for that great incident at the Brook Jabbok, which we shall look at later, you might think as if God's dealings and grace towards Jacob was just not moral. But my dear friends, if God deals with us according to our merits along the road, what hope for us is there that he knows how to catch up with us, not in judgment,

but in yet deeper grace, and change us, and break us, and give us a new name.

And this is what we shall see. He loves us just as we are. Because he does so, he doesn't leave us as we are.

And yet when he's worked deeply in our hearts and changed us, he's not going to love us anymore than he loves us right now in our sin. I believe that helps us to let our hair down and say, all right, work on then, Lord. Till on my soul eternal light shall break, I can afford to meet you.

I can afford to open up. I can afford to hear searching words, because it's the one who loves me as I am, who wants to change, and alter, and bless, even as he did with Jacob. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we feel like worshipping this morning. We want to thank thee for the God thou hast to field, the Father to be. And we want to thank thee for this extraordinary mystery of redemption, that when things go wrong, the only thing thou art interested in is recovery.

And we want to thank thee we can afford to let thee recover. You will nothing but good. And to say no is to miss the best.

And yet, Lord, we can't understand it. We're willing to say yes, Lord, to thee. Thou art right, I'm wrong.

Even our failures. Don't thwart that wonderful purpose you've made for each one of us. Thank you, Lord.

May this very fact make us more open to thee, more willing for thee to go deeply in all our hearts in these days. We ask it in thy name. And now, may the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore.

Amen.

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