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**SERIES: Fear or Faith? (Genesis Vol. 3)**

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You know, faith is one of those things it's really easy to talk about, but sometimes it's really hard to understand, how does it work out in the practical realities of life? I think one of the reasons it gets difficult to understand is because there is this strange relationship between the sovereignty of God - God has a plan and a purpose and a will that will be accomplished - but we as people made in His image still make choices, and we choose and determine and that alters the path of our lives. And so there's God's part and there's our part. I do believe all my days are ordained for me, but I don't step in front of buses. I mean, I do wear a seat belt. I have my responsibilities in the whole thing. I don't understand how God's sovereignty works with my choices, but that's sometimes the difficult part of trying to figure faith out.

Sometimes I struggle in this whole faith thing. Does faith mean that I wait on God or does faith mean I boldly step out? We're going to talk about the relationship of faith and fear and in the most practical ways, how do we really become a people of faith? And what does that mean? Now, there are a lot of questions we're not going to get answered. We may raise more questions than we answer, but my prayer would be a simple one. By the end of this study, we will both better understand and live the walk of faith.

Genesis 25 brings us to the closure of the life of Abraham. But one statement that I really like about Abraham is found in Verse Eight:

**Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life.** (Gen. 25:8, \*NASB)

If I could choose what was to be on my tombstone, it would be that: *he died satisfied with life*. I mean, isn't that really what we all want? People are looking to success and titles and pleasure and material things and money, all this stuff to ultimately find some level of satisfaction with life, and to be able to say *he died satisfied with life*. That's a great statement. How did Abraham achieve that? Well, he was a person of faith. Faith is the route to becoming satisfied with life.

Starting in Verse 12 through Verse 18, we just have the closure of the life of Ishmael. You remember, Ishmael was the son that Abraham had through his maid Hagar, and God promised Abraham that He would take care of Ishmael. As a matter of fact, Abraham asked God if Ishmael could be the *Son of Promise*. God said, No, it's not going to work that way, but I promise I'll take care of him. As a matter of fact, I'm going to make him the father of 12 nations. Ishmael will have 12 sons and they'll be princes over these 12 nations. And so this little section here just reminds us, God kept His word. He was faithful. There is a strong flavor of faith in this chapter. He was faithful to Abraham - *He died satisfied* - kept His promise to Abraham concerning Ishmael. We're just told that. And then there's closure. And now we move on to Isaac, the *Son of Promise*.

**Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham became the father of Isaac; and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; (vs. 19-21a)**

The opening verse, Verse 19, has a repetition. If you were to write this in an English paper, it'd come back with red ink. This is redundant, because it tells you two different times that Isaac is Abraham's son. But the point that's being made is this is not just another son. This is *the* son. This is the *Promised Seed*. God called Abraham out of his homeland and said, Abraham, I want you to go to a land that I will show you and I am going to bless you and I'm going to make you the father of a new nation. And through you, I am going to provide a *Promised Seed*. And through that seed, one day, all of the peoples of the Earth will be blessed. It was a promise that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the World, would come through Abraham and his son, and his son's son, right through the line, until ultimately it was the Messiah. So Abraham believed that. He believed that; he and Sarah had no children, but God promised. So they fixed up the baby's room, and they got all the furniture in place, and they waited and they waited and they waited, and pretty soon the baby's room was full of cobwebs, and the furniture is broken down, and they're still waiting. Now, one can only imagine how absolutely excruciating that was. God had promised and they believed that, but it was not lining up with the circumstances of life.

They waited for 10 years. They waited for 15 years. They waited for 20 years. They waited for 25 years, before they finally had the *Promise Son*. Now the writers of Scripture tell us why, because God wanted to make sure that Abraham and Sarah knew that this *Promise Seed*, this godly line, is going to come from me. It's not something you can produce in your own flesh, so we're going to wait until you're absolutely sure that there is no hope, and then you'll know this baby was from me. As a matter of fact, the writers of Scriptures say that by the time Sarah conceived, she was as good as dead in her ability to have a child. She was 90 years old when Isaac was born, Abraham was a hundred, so this introduction is reminding us, this is that *Promise Seed*. Now, you'd have to imagine that there were many times that Abraham and Sarah sat down with Isaac and told him the story, because everybody would have known that this was some kind of a miracle. He would have known - his parents were 90 years old and a hundred years old - and everybody would have known, and they would have often discussed how hard it was to wait, and what it was like before God finally fulfilled this promise. And he was a special son.

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So at the age of 40, Isaac gets married to Rebekah, and they build the baby's room and they put up the baby's furniture, and they're excited, because through Isaac and Rebekah is going to come the *Promise Seed* through them again. And so they waited and they waited and they waited. And Isaac is starting to think, this sounds like my mom and dad's story all over again. I'm sure they had heard the stories of what it was like to wait. Now he's thinking, we have to live that same story, and they waited for five years, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years, before Rebekah had a child. Again, it was God's reminder that this isn't something you've produced in your own flesh. This isn't something you can just do. I'm going to get you to a point where you realize this is from me. This is special. This is the *Son of Promise*. I also find it interesting that the text tells us that during that time, Verse 21,

**Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren;** (Vs. 21a)

and I mean, God promised; he didn't need to pray. God promised. I find myself thinking like that all too often. Sometimes I think, well, God promised, I don't need to pray, but I don't think that's necessarily true. It's prayer that reminds us that this is in God's hands and He has to do it. Even if He promised, it's prayer that aligns us with God, and so Isaac prayed. It's also interesting, that the text tells us that God heard and answered that prayer. He didn't just say, when it was God's sovereign timing. The writer's careful to say, No, it was an answer to Isaac's praying. Again, we have this strange relationship between the sovereign God and His promise, versus the activity of Isaac; and he prayed, and God answered that prayer, and gave them a child.

**and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her** (Vs. 21b-22a)

That word *struggled*, it's not like a normal baby in the womb. It means to be in conflict. It's like they were having a wrestling match in her womb. So much so,

**and she said, "If it is so, why then am I *this way*?"** (v. 22b)

(Notice that "this way" is in italics. It means it isn't in the Hebrew. It's just kind of the interpreter's end of the sentence. In the Hebrew, it's actually, why am I dot, dot, dot? In other words, the thought just kind of trails off. She's saying, God, finally it is the *Promise Seed*, but now what's going on here? Why is it...? And the thought just kind of trails away, so she takes it up with the Lord.)

**So she went to inquire of the Lord. The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples will be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger." When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau. Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel, [*which means they are still wrestling*] so his name was called Jacob; and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them.** (Vs. 22c-26)

Rebekah goes to the Lord and the Lord said, There's two boys in your womb and they are going to father two different nations. It would become Israel and Edom, Jacob and Esau. And a unique thing about this is that the older will serve the younger.

Now of course, that's not new in the book of Genesis. We've seen it several times, but it was very unique in the ancient near East. All of the rights and privileges went to the first son. He was the one that received the birthright. He received double the portion of inheritance, but with that birthright also went great responsibilities. You are the leader of your people, the patriarch in a sense. It is your responsibility to lead and to provide spiritual oversight. You will be the patriarch. That was all imposed upon the oldest son, but God said it's going to be different here. The older is going to serve the younger. Now if you have an analytical mind, you find yourself trying to figure out why. Paul was trying to figure out why in Romans Chapter Nine, and he concluded, because God did it that way, it didn't have anything to do with Jacob and Esau. It was just God and his grace saying, I'm going to pour favor on this one.

Grace is a very difficult thing for us to grasp. It just is. It's contrary to everything else we ever experience in life. Everything we're taught, everything we're trained about, is that you get what you deserve. There's a reward and punishment system. We're taught about fairness and what's right, and what's just, you had it coming to you, but grace doesn't operate on that standard. Grace is unmerited favor. It's God's favor poured on you, just because He does it and we don't know what to do with that. We love it when we're Jacob, Oh, this is great. We don't know what to do with it when we're Esau; it's not fair. Just imagine what that'd been like for Esau. Every other oldest son got the inheritance. All of his buddies got the inheritance. He was the only oldest son that didn't get it. It went to Jacob and he would think, that's not right. That's not fair. It belonged to me. That's what grace is. It's unmerited, and we love it when we're Jacob. We don't know what to do with it when we're Esau - why them? Why not me?

Well, the big question is how is Esau going to respond? This seems really hard. Well, let's find out.

Verse 27:

**When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents. Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished." Therefore his name was called Edom. But Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." Esau said, "Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?" And Jacob said, "First swear to me"; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. (vs. 27-34a)**

This is a familiar story. I've heard it told many, many times and almost always the conclusion is that Jacob's kind of a scoundrel and Esau is the victim. I would suggest to you that that is not correct. As a matter of fact, it's just the opposite.

Let's go back and look at the text a little bit more carefully - Verse 27 - **When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter**. Now when we hear hunter, we think sportsman, you know, pheasant hunter, duck hunter, deer hunter. But that really wasn't the picture in the ancient near East. A hunter was kind of a wild man, lived out away from the people, lived on his own, lived - it says here - **in the fields**, like out in the caves, kind of like an animal, had no real social skills that were developed, made his life by surviving and killing. It was just kind of a rough, wild type of an existence. Let's contrast that with Jacob. Notice the contrast is not an *and*. He's not saying Esau was this way *and* Jacob was that way, but it's a contrast. It's the word "but", saying they were opposites: **but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents**. That word *peaceful*'s probably unfortunate there. This is the exact same Hebrew word that's used in Job Chapter One, Verse Nine to say, Job was a perfect man. It's a word that means to be upright, to be a person full of integrity.

It's really a word that was saying Jacob was a man of integrity. He was a man of uprightness. He

was a man that walked rightly before God. Often I've heard it said that Esau was a *man's man* and Jacob was kind of a *mama's boy*. That isn't true at all. That isn't the picture here. It's a picture of one who was consumed with himself, and lived for survival, and was just kind of rough and crude and wild, versus one who lived among his people, lived in the tents, and cared about his people, and his heritage in *The Promise* and all of these things that mattered to God. That's really the comparison here.

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Bryan: It's great to have you with us today, and I'm really excited to introduce my friend and discussion partner Nat Crawford, who's part of the team now at Back to the Bible, and will be joining us in the discussion portion of this, through our study of Genesis here for the next couple of weeks. Nat, welcome.

Nat: Hey, it's good to be here. It's been fun listening to you and one of the things that really stuck out to me is trying to understand the relationship between faith on our part and God's involvement in that. It's challenging, isn't it?

Bryan: Yeah. It's really complicated. As a matter of fact, when that question comes up, I often refer people to Genesis and the story of the patriarchs, because you have clear statements of promise, so what God is going to fulfill. But then you have all these decisions that Abraham and Isaac and Jacob make, that create all kinds of difficult circumstances. And it's just a good example of that tension, that mystery, between the sovereignty of God and the fulfillment of His promises, and our part in the choices we make.

Nat: So it's fair to say there is still an element of mystery to it.

Bryan: Absolutely. There's a tension to it.

Nat: So here's a common question I've experienced as a pastor: if God is sovereign, then why don't I just leave it to Him? I mean, why do I get involved at all? So what's God's role in this? And I think, more specifically, how does prayer interact with faith?

Bryan: Yeah, so great question. And again, there's a mystery to this. But I think the danger is either thinking, because God is sovereign, there's no reason to pray, which is kind of a form of fatalism, or clear the other way, that somehow I can manipulate God, through some sort of repetitive prayers, to get what I want.

But what's interesting in this story, and you have this here and there in the Old Testament, is the text specifically says, the Lord answered Isaac in giving Rebekah a child, so you take that at face value. He prayed; he asked. You had the same thing when Hannah was praying for a child in First Samuel. And Eli says, because you prayed, God's going to give you the petition you asked of Him. You know the weird story, when Moses intercedes for the nation of Israel, when they built the golden calf and Moses has come down from Mt. Sinai and God's going to wipe them all out. And Moses intercedes, and the text says, the Lord said, Moses, because you prayed, I changed my mind. So how does that work with a sovereign God? I have no idea. But **I do believe God hears and answers our prayers.**