

**SERIES: Unwavering Faith (Genesis Vol. 3)**

**By Pastor Bryan Clark**

**Message Title: When Fear Comes Home Pt. 2**

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Somewhere along the way, Esau decided that if he was going to be happy, if he was going to get what he wanted to get out of life, he had to do it himself. His fear was if he did not look out for himself, nobody else would, which drives him to selfish behavior. So that is how he lived his life; it was just for himself. We are told at the end of Chapter 26 that nothing has changed. He marries these two Canaanite women that just grieved his father and mother. But he didn't care; the women were what he wanted.

I think probably, much to his surprise, he is called before his father, and his father tells him that he is going to receive the blessing. Now he has already sold the birthright. This must have come as quite a surprise, but a very welcome surprise. He heads out, gets his wild game, and brings it back. When he appears before his father, his father asks him, "Who are you?" His response is interesting: "I am Esau, your firstborn." In other words, it is his way of saying, "I deserve this blessing; I'm the one that has the right to it." Then he finds out what has transpired. Jacob has deceived his father and taken Esau's blessing. He is in anguish, and he grieves, and he begs his father for some sort of a blessing. But he gets none.

What I think is interesting about Esau is that Esau had convinced himself that the only way to be happy, the only way to be fulfilled, the only way to really get what he is wanting in life is to do it himself. That is what drives his selfishness. Life for him is a competition, and he is in competition with his brother Jacob for the blessing. Whenever it's a competition, it comes down to who wins. Esau lost, and he is coming to grips with that. Immediately the writer tells us Esau bears a grudge: *When dad is dead and gone, I'm going to kill Jacob.* In his heart, nothing has changed. He is in a competition with Jacob, and Jacob won. So there's one last step Esau can take—then Jacob must die. It's the same thing that Cain did, all the way back in Genesis 4, when he killed his brother Abel.

But what about Jacob? It is just amazing how deceitful Jacob is before his father. Numerous times his father questions him, and Jacob just flat out lies about who he is. It is interesting, too, that when his father asks him, "How did you accomplish this so quickly?" that Jacob drags God into this. "Well, the God that you serve, He did it for me." I think that's the writer's way of saying that Jacob in his own mind had rationalized this, to the point where he thought what he was doing was right. He had no hesitation to bring God in, as if God were doing this, because Jacob had convinced himself that this was right. In the end, God wanted Jacob blessed, so what difference does it make if they have to scheme and lie and deceive a little bit, in order to accomplish what God wanted? I think both Jacob and Rebekah had convinced themselves that God was honoring this little scheme of theirs.

Jacob's fear was the same as Rebekah's—that somehow God has lost control. Abraham and Sarah had the same fear. When Sarah couldn't get pregnant with the Promise Seed, they sat down and thought, *You know, God needs some help. He's just having trouble here and He can't*

*fulfill His promise.* So they came up with a plan that Abraham would have relations with his maid, and through his maid would come the Promise Seed. God had to show up on the scene and say, “I don’t need any help; I’ve got everything under control. I just need you to trust Me.” That’s what Jacob and Rebekah needed to do. They just needed to say, “You know, God’s got this thing under control. He’ll figure it out.” But they don’t do that. They panic.

Rebekah is similar to that. Rebekah responds the same way. She’s got this fear that if they don’t act, then God’s plan is all going to be lost. So we’ve got to help Him out. Rebekah had learned that Isaac really couldn’t be trusted. He had a pattern of bad choices and poor judgment. So as soon as Esau slips into the tent, then Rebekah slips up to the door and she listens. I think she knew what was coming. She hears what Isaac says, and immediately her plan goes into effect. Now I don’t think she just thought this plan up. I think she saw it coming. As a matter of fact, we’re told that she had stashed these garments of Esau in her tent. She already had them. She was ready.

It is interesting that when Rebekah explains to Jacob what Isaac said, she doesn’t quote him quite accurately. When Isaac was talking to Esau, he said, “Come, that I might bless you.” But when Rebekah is talking to Jacob, she says, “Your father said ‘that I might bless you in the presence of the Lord.’ ” Isaac didn’t say that, but I think again the writer is saying that she is convinced that if Isaac does this with Esau, then God somehow is obligated to honor that and God’s whole plan is going to crash. So in her own mind, she has justified her scheme, in order to save God’s plan. I think you see it again when Jacob questions, “What if we get caught?” And she says, “I’ll take the heat.” It’s Rebekah’s way of saying, “I think we’re doing the right thing here.” She wasn’t worried about that.

When it is all said and done, I think both Jacob and Rebekah thought that their cause was right. In their own minds they rationalize their lying, their scheming, their deceiving, their manipulating, believing the ends justify the means. You know, it is easy to do that. When we get in our minds that our cause is just, that what we are doing is right, it isn’t that hard to rationalize our scheming, our manipulating, our lying, our deceiving. Sometimes out in the marketplace, the way the game is played lacks integrity, and we rationalize our behavior by saying, “that’s just the way the game is played; you have to do that to survive.” That’s fear. That’s not faith. God expects us to do what is right, and we live with the consequence of that. God hasn’t lost control; everything is not falling apart.

Sometimes when our cause is just, we don’t blatantly lie and deceive. We just misrepresent the facts; we shade the truth. We present things in such a way that it promotes our agenda, but we are not completely honest. When a husband and wife start to do that, their relationship starts to disintegrate. When a parent does that with a child or a child with a parent, when business partners begin to operate that way, it all starts to fall apart.

It was interesting that a number of the commentators really saw no problem in what Jacob and Rebekah did. They went back to other incidents in the Bible where people seem to have lied and God honored that. For example, Rahab the harlot lied about the spies being in her house. For example, the midwives lied about the sons that were born in Pharaoh’s day, and God seemed to honor that. This is a discussion that has gone on for hundreds and hundreds of years about situational ethics. When is it right to lie? There has always been a big discussion about events during World War II, when people housed Jews to hide them, and the Nazis came and these people would lie, saying, “They’re not here.” Is that situation right, or is it wrong?

I don't find that a terribly complicated discussion myself. I just think it's always wrong to lie. I think it's always wrong to deceive. Our lies, our deceptions, our scheming, our manipulations—they're all driven by fear. It's the fear that somehow God has lost control, and we've got to help Him out. God Himself is described as the "Truth." He doesn't just tell the truth, He *is* Truth. How could God ever honor that which is deceitful and untrue? Sometimes God works in spite of us, just like in this story, but that doesn't justify the behavior.

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Then there's Isaac. The writer goes out of his way at the end of Chapter 26 to tell us Esau was a messed-up guy who made his parents' life miserable. So the last thing we are expecting is that Isaac is going to bring in Esau and bless him and make him the head of the family. You really have to wonder about Isaac's judgment. I mean, what is really wrong with this guy? In both stories (this one and the previous story), we are told that Isaac sides with Esau, because he liked to eat the food that Esau prepared. You really find yourself wondering, if it's possible this guy's belly so controls his life that it leads to these horrible lapses in judgment. I mean, that must have been some *good* stew! [Laughter]

I think it's possible that it's more of an imagery here, of saying that Isaac just flat didn't get it. He just didn't believe it. God came to him over and over again and made these magnificent promises on the basis of grace, and Isaac just didn't get it. He didn't believe it. He didn't buy it. There was this sovereign power who was committed to Isaac to do what he could not do for himself, and he just didn't believe it; he didn't buy it. So Isaac is just plodding through life, doing what anybody else in that culture was doing, and following the traditions of his people. God said, "I want you to bless Jacob," and Isaac says, "Well, it's normal to bless the oldest." He is just plodding through, living his life as if God is not even a factor. His fear was, he just didn't believe God.

If there is a ray of hope in this sad story, it is what happens in Verse 33, when Isaac becomes aware that he has been tricked and Jacob has received the blessing. It says he trembled. As a matter of fact, the Hebrew says, "He trembled a great trembling"—very graphic language. He wasn't trembling just because he got tricked. He was trembling because, at that moment, he realized God will have His way. And he realized that God speaks the truth, and His will and plan will be accomplished. There's nothing Isaac can do to change that.

At that moment, there was a level of fear, as he trembled at the reality of God's promise. That is why he says, "I blessed him," and then it's as if he pauses and maybe scratches his chin a little bit and says, "Yes, he will be blessed." In other words, at that moment he realizes God will have His way. But it's not just that Jacob will be blessed; it's that God told the truth when He said He would bless Jacob. In Chapter 28 when Jacob is sent away, Isaac basically restates the covenant promises. He says, "Jacob, you will have land. You will have people. You will have all of these promises that God made to Abraham." For the first time in Isaac's life, he finally gets it.

Now when you turn to Hebrews 11, you will find that Isaac does show up in the Faith Hall of Fame. You might wonder, *How does this guy get in there?* Well, the writer of Hebrews is very clear. Isaac gets in there on this one statement. It is this moment that is the "Aha!" moment for Isaac when, for the first time in his life, he actually believes that God told the truth. He believed that by faith his son Jacob would have land and multiples of nations and all the blessings that God promised Abraham. Up until this moment, Isaac just didn't believe it.

It isn't hard to identify with Isaac at all. Isaac was living as if God was a non-factor; he was just kind of plodding through life, in spite of the promises God had made. So often we're plodding through life as if God is a non-factor. He has made all these magnificent promises to us, yet we're anxious, we're stressed out, we're fearful. We live as if God didn't make those promises at all, like He's not really going to do what He said He was going to do. Oftentimes it's hard to tell the difference between those who say they believe in Christ and those who don't. We can be plodding through life the same way, with the same values and the same lifestyles.

If God's promises are true, there ought to be a radical difference between those who know Christ and those who don't. And it simply comes down to whether or not we believe. Isaac's fear was he just didn't buy it. Somehow it wasn't true. It didn't apply to him, until that "Aha!" moment when he finally realized, *God means this!*

Four people in one family—all four driven by fear. And the family was destroyed. Why? Because fear drives us to see what we can get, so we become incredibly selfish. We're convinced that, *If I don't look out for myself, nobody else will.* Fear causes us to scheme and manipulate and lie and deceive and take matters into our own hands. And it's easy to justify that because our cause is right, we think we're on the side of right. Fear causes us to plod along through life as if God doesn't exist, as if His promises aren't true. We are just trying to crank it out every day like everybody else.

When we're driven by fear, we're in relationships to *get*. And when everybody is *getting*, that's competition, which is always going to lead to unhealthy relationships. It has to. The alternative is faith—believing, rather than being selfish and acting in ways to get what I need. Faith means I trust God; I trust that He will give me what I need. Rather than feeling like I have to scheme and manipulate and lie and cheat, I just do what is right, and leave the consequences with God. I believe He hasn't lost control. Faith means that I believe the promises of God. I don't live as if they aren't true. I believe them. I live them out.

The reality is that all of you are going to build relationships either on the basis of fear or faith. If it's fear, those relationships will unravel and you will live with the consequences of that. If it's faith, you will experience the relationships that God intended. You find your meaning, your significance, your purpose, your love *in Him*, and your relationships are motivated by a desire to *give* rather than to *get*, a desire to *complete* rather than *compete*.

What will it be for you? Is it fear? Or is it faith?

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Nat: Bryan, that is a really good message. The dynamics in Isaac and Rebekah's family were really difficult, weren't they?

Bryan: Very difficult. You have a husband and wife divided, you have the two boys divided, you have a lot at stake. I mean the text told us Isaac was very wealthy, so there's a lot at stake here and it's a really good example of fear versus faith. And you just wrestle with, how might the story have been different if Isaac would have led the way?

Nat: Right. And again, it seems like fear is at the center of the problem, right?

Bryan: Absolutely it is.

Nat: One of the things you mentioned is situational ethics and I think we encounter this all the time. That conversation about situational ethics can be really complicated, can't it?

Bryan: Yeah. It can get really complicated. So over the years it's ranged from, were Corrie Ten Boom and her family, were they wrong to lie about the Jews they were hiding during World War II? All the way to, if you put your lights on a timer, so they come on in the evening, is that deceptive? Is that sin? And everything in between. So, it does get complicated. I have found over the years, a little common sense helps. I don't think if you're putting your house lights on a timer, you're really trying to deceive the world. But I think you do get into matters more like with Corrie Ten Boom, stories like that, what is the right thing to do? And it can get complicated.

Nat: Yeah. I've noticed over the years, people sometimes will bring up the story of Rahab too, right? [Yes.] So here we have one where, you know, she clearly lied. And so there's that, "Aha, there's the one exception to the rule." [Right.] But I think that we're missing the point that the lie has nothing really to do with the story. [Right] Yup.

Bryan: Yeah. I don't think the point of the story was go out and lie, but I think it was God being faithful.

Nat: Exactly right, exactly right. So what are some practical ways that fear shows up in our lives today, but also how would faith change the way we live day to day?

Bryan: So yeah, great question. So I think fear flows out of our doubt. And so I think then faith is what guides us to trust God day to day. So think of it this way. You're trusting God to meet your most legitimate needs, rather than doing it my own way. I'm trusting God that His way is best, not my way. So I'm trusting God that sin is not the pathway to happiness, even though at times it may seem like it. So it's trusting God when the doctor says cancer. It's trusting God when I lose my job. It's trusting God when I'm 30 and still single. It's trusting God when somebody else gets the promotion. It's the most ordinary, practical stuff of life. Do I doubt or do I trust God?

Nat: And I think a key component of our faith is looking back at those markers of God's faithfulness in our own lives and in the lives of those who came before us.

Bryan: Yeah, I think that's a great point Nat. That's really a significant way to grow our faith, is to rehearse the ways God's been faithful in the past, to believe He'll be faithful tomorrow.

Nat: Thanks Bryan.