

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

**By Pastor Bryan Clark**

**Message Title: Winners and Losers**

**Release Date: 4-24-20**

In the *Omaha World-Herald*, there was an article about the modern-day televangelists. It went back and talked about the days of Jim Bakker and PTL and Jimmy Swaggart. They talked about how that whole industry came crashing down. But what has happened is that the industry has rebuilt on that rubble, and it is bigger than ever, because the message is such that God's favor and God's blessing means material prosperity. Therefore, in order to communicate to their followers that God is pleased with me, they live with that abundance and affluence.

But is that really true? Has God bought into the value system of the world—that what God means by His blessing is that which is material and short-sighted and doomed to rust and decay? Is that what God is interested in? You watch those television shows and see the auditoriums packed with thousands of people. It would be easy to say, “Wow, they have all that money and they have all those people. Surely God must be blessing them.” It seems to me—halfway through the race, they seem to be winning... if that is God's value system.

Patti and I happen to be avid junkers. We just have this thing for junk. Not modern junk—we like old junk. Our idea of a romantic date is to go to the junkyards and dig through stuff. We like to fix it or make something out of it or just look at it. I know what you are thinking. You are thinking, *They are not normal!* But junkyards are great places to gain perspective. You look around at this stuff and realize that at one time these things were treasures. At one time people worked long, hard hours to buy this thing, that today is in the junkyard. We have to remember that all of our stuff is going to end up in a junkyard, in a junk pile. Is that really what it is all about? Is that really what defines success? Once a year all of us need to go to a salvage yard and just look around. We need to remind ourselves that our vehicles are going to end up in the same place.

That does not mean that we shouldn't buy a new vehicle. It does not mean that we should not buy new stuff. I like to buy. But it does mean that we need to gain some perspective that says this stuff is not about God's blessing. It isn't about defining success. It is not really the stuff that even matters much to God.

We talk about the fact that we need to live for that which is eternal, but that is so vague. That is so big that sometimes it is hard to understand what that means. What if we were to shrink it down into terms that maybe we could grasp a little better and apply what I call the “hundred-year test.” That is a more manageable framework. We can ask ourselves, *What is it I am involved in, what is it that I am passionate about, what is it that I am giving my life to that a hundred years from now will still matter?* A hundred years from now our material stuff will be in a junkyard. It will be in a pile. If that is the definition of success, it is rather pathetic. But a hundred years from now, what will really matter? When you think about it that way, you are

starting to get some grasp of God's value system. 19:11 God is not really into things that will end up in a junkyard in twenty years. He is into things that last. 19:16 That is the hundred-year test.

Let's think about Jacob and Esau again now. It appears halfway through the story that Jacob has really struggled. Jacob has not had an easy life. It seems like Esau is on cruise control. Which one of them is blessed? Well, we are only halfway through the race.

Maybe the best way to understand this is to look at a passage in the New Testament—Hebrews 12. The writer of Hebrews says it much better than I can. At the beginning of Hebrews 12, the writer talks about a race. He says that to run the race well we have to lay aside all the weights, all the entanglements, and everything that holds us back, in order to run the best race possible so that we can win. To do that, God has got to be involved in our lives and helping us lay aside those entanglements. Look at the passage, beginning with Hebrews 12:5:

**My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.**

(NASB, Hebrews 12: 5b-11)

If we were to apply this passage to Jacob, what we would say is there is a reason why Jacob has struggled throughout his life as the son of promise - because God is working on him. God is training him and God is breaking him. Because God is humbling him, because God wants Jacob to understand what it means to be a man of faith. God's really not paying a lot of attention to Esau. Esau is not his son; Esau is not his child. Esau is just living. But God has great plans for Jacob, and He is working him over.

Sometimes you may look around you and it seems like the godless around you have everything going right for them. They seem to have life by the tail, and you feel like you are just constantly struggling. You feel like you have this difficulty and that difficulty. You know, you may be right. You may be right, because they are not God's children and you are. And right now God's attention is not on them; it is on *you*. He is shaping you and He is molding you. And He's humbling you and breaking you, in order to cause you to run the very best race you can. It says in Hebrews 12 that you run this race with endurance and you lay aside all these entanglements. It is like an athletic team. If a coach is yelling at you, it is probably because he thinks you have the ability to contribute to the team. The worst thing is when the coach ignores you; it is probably because he thinks you have nothing to offer.

God is paying attention to you and He is working you over so that you ultimately run the very best race possible. That is God's blessing. God's blessing is His commitment to you to mold and shape you and make you into the image of Christ. It is not a bunch of material stuff.

Paul loved the metaphor of a race. In Philippians he talks about being willing to count everything as rubbish, as trash, as junk—in order to know Christ. Why? “Looking forward to that upward call in Christ Jesus.” That language was Greek language. It was taken right out of the Greek games that described a runner who has finished a race, who would be called up to the judges’ stand to receive his reward. Paul is thinking about a race and thinking, *I am willing to count everything as trash in order to run the best race I can, because I want to be called up to the victor’s stand and know that I was a winner in Christ.* Paul says to the Corinthians that he is running in such a way that he might win.

-----

Well, let’s take this back to Genesis 36. Let’s call this halfway through the race. It appears that maybe Esau is winning. It appears that maybe Esau is blessed and Jacob has struggled. But when you read through chapter 36, you keep getting this constant reminder that Esau is Edom. Esau is the father of the Edomites. The first readers would have clearly understood what that meant. First, they will be the enemy. And secondly, the Edomites do not win the race.

Let’s apply the hundred-year test. In this case, it is the several hundred-year test. How did Jacob do? What was Jacob involved in? What did God do with Jacob that would last? Hundreds of years later God would speak to Moses and say, “Moses, I am calling you to lead My people out of bondage in Egypt into the land of promise.” And Moses said, “God, I can’t do that. Why are you calling me? These people won’t listen to me. Who should I tell them called me?” And God said, “You tell them it is the God of Abraham. It is the God of Isaac. It is the God of Jacob.” Can you imagine God referring to Himself that way—if you were Jacob? Hundreds of years later, did it matter? Yes. God called Himself the God of Jacob. That is amazing.

What about the Edomites? If you go to a little book towards the end of the Old Testament, written by a prophet by the name of Obadiah, you find out. Obadiah was a prophet that talked about God’s judgment to the Edomites. In that short little book, God says the Edomites are through. They are done. He says, “I am wiping them out. I am wiping them out because of their pride, because of their arrogance, and because of how they treated Jacob. They are done.” He says Jacob will flourish, while the Edomites are done. That is what He is referring to in Genesis 36 when He keeps reminding us, “It may look like Esau is doing great, but he is the father of the Edomites. They don’t win.”

If you turn on the nightly news, you are not going to find any reports about the Edomites—because they are gone. They don’t exist as a nation. They haven’t existed since before the time of Christ. But every night in the news, you hear about the people of Jacob, who to this day continue to be a people. It may have looked like Esau was winning halfway through the race, but who won that race? It was the one who was blessed, whom God was working on and pouring into, sculpting and developing. Jacob makes it into the Faith Hall of Fame in Hebrews 11.

Perhaps the greatest contest between the line of Esau and the line of Jacob was seen 2000 years ago, when one with all of the wealth and power of this world stood in judgment over a poor carpenter who was about to be crucified. Jesus was of the line of Jacob. He was the promised seed. Herod was an Edomite. And there is the contest between Esau and Jacob. Herod had everything this world had to offer. He had the wealth and the power. It appeared for a moment that perhaps he was the victor. But of course, we know the end of the story. Herod is destroyed, and Jesus is exalted and seated at the right hand of the Father forever. That is the end of the race.

Going into this next year, we all need to stop and think, *What is it that I am giving my life to? What is it to me that really matters? What is it that I am passionate about?* Put the hundred-year test to it. What is it that I am going to be involved in during the next year, that a hundred years from now will still matter? Am I dedicated to working hard so I can just buy a bunch of junk that, twenty years from now ends up in the junk heap? What is the point of that? What a waste! Halfway through the race it may seem like you are winning. People may be very impressed. But at the end of the race, you have lost. Put the hundred-year test to it and ask yourself, *What is really going to last? What is going to matter?*

Here is the rub with that. Because God's value system is so much different than the value system of this world, if you choose to live for the things that God values it is likely that your peers, your friends, your work associates, will not view you as successful today. You have to be willing to live with that. If you are not going to play their game, they probably are not going to be impressed. They probably are not going to look at you as being really successful. You have to keep in mind that the race is only half over. Are you committing yourself to that which, at the end of the race, will matter—so that you ultimately end up a winner?

You say, "How do you know that? How do you know that in the end that is what will matter?" *By faith.* I can't prove it to you. I can only tell you that is what God says. That is what He promises, and I choose to believe it by faith. If I believe that is what will matter in the end, then that is what I live for today.

-----

Nat: We have to run this race by faith or we're going to lose our way and ultimately waste our lives. What the world applauds is not what really matters in the end. Is it?

Bryan: Right. And so again, I think that's very hard because you're wrestle with how do you know? How do you know what ultimately matters? And the only answer is by faith, God said it and believe it by faith. So you think about the rewards of this world, they're tangible, they're immediate you can touch them, you can feel them, you can spend them, but the eternal rewards really are much more vague and mysterious and you have to take it by faith.

Nat: One of the things that really stuck out to me in this message is the hundred year test. I think that's really helpful for people as they start to weigh out where they invest their time and their treasure and their talents. So most of what people live for, I've noticed, won't really matter much in 10 years, let alone 100 right?

Bryan: Right. So now we're back to the junkyard to regain some perspective, but it is easy to get caught up in all of that. Several years ago, a guy was probably in his seventies very wealthy, had pretty much sacrificed his marriage and his kids and everything for money and success. And God had just really struck him in a message. But he was standing in the hallway of the church and he was crying and he looked me in the eyes and he just said, what have I done? He's like, I have wasted everything. And at some point you really don't have much time to go back. He was realizing, I lost my marriage, I lost my kids. And what a horrible moment in that moment to realize you've really not lived for the things that matter. So we live in a throwaway culture, but we do not throw away our lives. And it's like every day matters. So again, you can't go back, change the past, but every day matters. We can't afford to keep throwing away days.

Nat: Right. You never want to see someone in so much pain, but also at the same moment, that's

when everything can change for them. [Right.] And it's one of the things I'm so thankful for about my relationship with God is that not only does He save ourselves, but He redeems our lives. And so today really matters. Bryan, you talked about the idea that God is focusing on his children right now. So He's doing all He can do to grow us and to make sure we live for the things that matter. Is that right?

Bryan: Right. So even think about wasting our lives. God doesn't want that. So He's intervening, trying to get our attention and to get us to live for the things that matter. So yes, God's focused on me as his child. It's just like when my girls were little, I didn't train and equip and discipline the neighbor's kids or strange kids at the store. But I did my kids and that's the way God views it. That's what Hebrews 12 says, we're God's children right now. His focus is on us and growing us and equipping us and changing us, and someday He'll focus on the rest. But right now His focus is on us. He wants us to learn and grow. And that's the story of Jacob --God's relentless commitment to growing Jacob.

Nat: So you're telling me I shouldn't be disciplining the my neighbor's kids? That would've been helpful information a little bit sooner. [Yeah.] Wow, that's great. No, and that is really encouraging to know that God loves us so much that He will correct us in His timing, in His way.

You know, the story of Jacob. It is so encouraging from the standpoint that He messes up so often just again and again. And yet God introduces himself as the God of Moses and the God of Abraham and Isaac, and even Jacob. Our story really is not defined by our great performance, but instead by God's great faithfulness to us all, wouldn't you?

Bryan: I absolutely think so. That's one of the things I love about the Jacob story -- he really messes up a lot. And the fact is we can all relate to that. We can all identify our own messes. We've all been there, yet God is so faithful in some ways, so unbelievably faithful. I mean, I think it's hard for us sometimes to really come to grips with that and believe it. So you think about the world's system, it always limits the prize to the highest achievers and very few will ever get there. And even that's temporary at best. But God isn't like that. He offers the reward to everyone equally if we're just willing to trust Him and believe by faith.

Nat: Wow, that is a great reminder. I have no doubt that this week has spoken a lot to our listeners. I know it's spoken a lot to me. Thank you, Bryan.