

# God's Faithfulness, God's Promises

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[0:00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm one of the pastors here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today.

We are continuing our series in the book of Genesis. Really, we're ending our series in the book of Genesis. We just have a little bit left this week and two more weeks. You'll remember that Genesis is the first book in the Bible. It's the origin story of God's people, Israel. And this summer we have been looking at the story of Jacob found in chapters 25 through 36.

And as we come near the end, we are tying up some loose ends. In many ways, the story of Jacob has been one big character study. We've seen dramatic transformation. Jacob has changed so much and we've also seen dramatic failure.

Last week, failure with Jacob's deafening silence in the face of great evil. And so one of the questions that comes from our passage this morning is this, how do we recover from failure?

How's Jacob going to pick up the pieces after what happened in chapter 34 last week? And now as I began studying this passage at the beginning, you know, we're just doing half of chapter 35.

[1:19] And the beginning of the week, I thought, oh no, there's not enough material. I should have done all of 35. Then I kept going and I thought, no, there's way too much material. So I'm going to say this, as I often do, there's a lot going on in the first 15 verses here.

And so I'm going to say something, not everything. Our goal is to always hit the high points, if nothing else. We're going to look at two things in this passage, God's faithfulness and God's promises.

You don't need to write that, Dan. You'll see it on page 8 of your worship guide as the sermon title. With that, I invite you to turn with me to Genesis chapter 35, which you'll find on page 7 of your worship guide.

As we turn to it, remember that this is God's word. In Isaiah chapter 40 tells us, the grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

And so that's why we read now Genesis 35, starting at verse 1. God said to Jacob, So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gold gods that they had and the rings that were in their ears.

[2:55] Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem. And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

And Jacob came to Luz, that is Bethel, which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. And there he built an altar and called the place El Bethel, because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother.

And Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So he called its name Alan Bacchus. God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan Aram and blessed him.

And God said to him, Your name is Jacob. No longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name. So he called his name Israel.

And God said to him, I am God Almighty, be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of kings shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body.

[4:02] The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you. Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him.

And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it. So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you, and we thank you again for bringing us together as your people.

We also ask for your help. We admit that we are feeble and frail, often distracted, not as smart as we wish we were.

And so we need your help by your spirit. I ask that you would use your word, you'd use my ordinary words in a powerful way, that you would make what we do here this morning greater than the sum of its parts, that ultimately you would speak to us by your spirit, that you would soften our hearts, grow our love and affection for you, and that you'd help us to see clearly what you have for us in your word, and most of all, you'd help us to see Jesus.

[5 : 23] We ask all of these things in his mighty name. Amen. Counselors and psychologists have a concept that they call splitting.

It's the same word we would use if we talk about splitting wood. And splitting is when you decide to see people as all good or all bad.

So someone is either a hero or they're a villain. And that's typically not a good thing. And so it's the work of counselors and psychologists to try to move people away from that, that they're able to hold the good and the bad together, so they can move away from black and white thinking as they look at the people in their lives.

And that's one of our challenges with Jacob. Jacob has been back and forth, sometimes a hero, sometimes a villain. Jacob had this huge growth spurt.

You'll remember in chapters 31 through 33, we saw Jacob begins to finally give thanks and praise to God. He realizes, hey, all these blessings, they didn't come because I'm smart, but because God is great.

[6 : 32] Chapter 32, we got to see Jacob pray his very first prayer. He's finally willing to be dependent on God and not just his own scale. And so we were cheering during those moments, thinking, wow, isn't God so great?

He's been at work in Jacob's life. Jacob has been changing and moving and growing. And then chapters 33 and 34, we have this huge setback.

End of chapter 33, Jacob doesn't return all the way to the promised land. He stops at Shechem, just 20 miles short of where he's supposed to be.

And Andy pointed out last week, as we were looking at chapter 34, Jacob's enamored by the wealth, the prosperity, the opportunities that Shechem presents.

Man, none of 34 would have happened if Jacob had just gone all the way, just returned to Bethel. His compromised heart cares more about safety and comfort than his daughter.

[7 : 44] It was last week, his deafening silence in the face of great violence. So we can't split Jacob. We can't see Jacob as all good. We can't see him as all bad.

No, he's a human. God's at work. Jacob's growing. And at the same time, he hasn't arrived, right? There's always things pulling him away, tempting him, distracting him.

And the point is this. Same is true for us. There are always things trying to pull us away from God, calling us away from where he's pointed us.

There's always these lesser things that are trying to grab at our hearts, chasing after these trinkets instead of real treasure. We're never immune from that in the Christian life.

Part of the Christian life is turning back to God again and again. That's part of the point of our worship, by the way. We come back Sunday after Sunday because part of what it means to be human is to constantly be distracted, constantly face the temptation to be pulled away.

[8 : 54] And so we come every week to reorient ourselves, to remember where true north is, to reset, put our eyes back on the right place. Sometimes we sing that hymn, right?

Come thou fount of every blessing, which says, prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. That's the Christian life. That same hymn says we need God's grace to act like a fetter, to bind us to him.

So that's Jacob. Can't split him. He's not all good. He's not all bad. Great success, great growth, also great failure. God's grace to act like a fetter. Still faces the temptations of any human.

The good news is this. In the midst of our failure and our sin, God is always calling us back. In the midst of our failure and sin, God continues to pursue his people.

It's true of us, by the way. Our call to worship this morning, really every Sunday, it's a call that comes from God, not from us, which is a recognition. God's always the one drawing us back in.

[10:08] Jacob's great failure last week with Dinah, his silence, his passivity, and yet God doesn't give up on him.

God comes to Jacob and calls him back. That takes us to verse one. God said to Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there.

Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau. In other words, do what I told you to do. Back in chapter 31.

Four chapters ago. Do what I originally said and go home. If you'd done that to begin with, you could have skipped all that pain. Jacob rightly recognizes here that turning back to God means he has to turn away from other things, turn away from sin.

Last week he was at his worst. He was incredibly passive. Now Jacob takes on the mantle again of family leadership. He's finally active. He is leading his family back to the Lord.

[11:15] That takes us to verse two where he tells them, put away these foreign gods, purify yourselves. Verse three, this is so that we can go to Bethel, make an altar. So we're going to have to go to Bethel to do that, to go towards God.

We're going to have to leave all these other things behind. And so there's this purification that happens in verse two. Part of the reason for that purification is everything that's happened in the last chapter.

All the violence and the war and the battling. Verse four, they have to get rid of their gods.

Remember Rachel took some of Laban's gods with her.

Now a number of chapters ago. Remember she sat on them. She put them in the camel saddle.

She has to get rid of those and all the other foreign gods and the rings and they hide on the tree.

The tree that is in Shechem.

In other words, we're going to leave all these things behind. We're not taking them with us to Bethel.

Now we're burying them. They're in the past. And so the point is this.

[12:14] As long as you have breath, it is never too late to return. As long as you're alive, it is never too late to turn around.

You know what Jacob? You messed up. And you didn't just mess up in a little way. You messed up in a big way. And you can still choose.

You can choose to do what God told you to do all the way back in chapter 31. It's never too late.

Remember I told you one of the questions this passage brings up is how do we recover from failure?

And the answer is this. We receive God's grace. God's always calling us back. We put away our sin and we turn towards righteousness.

As long as you're still alive, your story isn't over. God never gives up on you. Always an opportunity to repair and return.

[13:26] Now there's two different mistakes that we can make in that. Thankfully Jacob doesn't do these, but I want to point them out. One mistake, error one, is that we despair in the face of failure.

This is where you believe there's no future for yourself. Satan's the father of lies and this is one of his favorite lies. Satan loves to come to you and say, you know what, you messed up in that way and so you don't have a future.

You said the wrong thing. You did the wrong thing. You know what God did? God gave up on you.

And so it's time for you to give up as well.

That's a lie from the pit of hell, by the way. And it's a lie that Satan loves to tell us in the midst of failure. Don't believe it. Remember Jacob.

God is always calling his people back. Error two is denial. So error one, despair. Error two, denial.

Thankfully Jacob doesn't do this, but denial is refusing to acknowledge our sin.

[14:29] It's always someone else's fault. You know people like this. All of us have been like this at certain times. You know you're always the victim, never the perpetrator.

Somehow it's always someone else who messed things up. The scary news of Christianity is this, that you and I are the problem.

And Christianity is the only religion that makes it safe to admit that. Safe to say out loud, no, it's not everyone else around me.

No, it's actually me. And the reason Christianity makes it safe to do that is because in Christianity, our hope is not in our performance, but in God's faithfulness.

Our hope is not in our performance, but in God's faithfulness. And that's why our failure is not the end of the story. Real repentance means we do not ignore the past.

[15 : 42] We repent of it. We move away from it. So not despair, that's error one. Not denial, that's error two. But repentance, the reason we can repent is because our hope is not in our performance, but in God's faithfulness.

And our hope is in God's faithfulness because of Jesus Christ. That it is his performance that we rest on and look to. That in the midst of our failure, we're able to say, I still have a future. It's not over for me. Not because of some pie-in-the-sky hope, but because Jesus, in real time and real space, came and lived as a man on this earth.

Lived the perfect life that I should have lived, gave that to me, died the death I should have died, spared me from that.

That's the hope of a Christian. That's why we don't despair. We don't give up. Your story's not over. That's why we don't deny. It's safe to tell the truth.

[16 : 51] Remember, 2 Timothy chapter 2. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. I don't want you to miss the grace in Jacob's story.

Jacob's story is not the story of a man who pulls himself up by his bootstraps. That's what Jacob believed at the beginning of his life. Jacob believed it was all up to him, that he was smart enough and cunning enough.

No, Jacob's sin is not the end of his story. Not the end of his story because of God's grace. Our sins, our mistakes, our failures, not the end of our stories either, if we're in Christ.

But, here's the kicker. We have to have real repentance. A real turning away from sin. A real turning towards new paths.

I also want you to notice God's grace in protecting Jacob. Look at verse 5 with me. And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

[18 : 04] In other words, what Jacob does here is risky. God calls him to Bethel. You might think, oh, that's not hard. He has to go 20 miles. Right, but he's going 20 miles as he passes by these cities that now hate him because of chapter 34.

The end of chapter 34, remember his great fear. The indictment on Jacob was that he didn't care about Dinah, but he cared about his own skin. He cared about his own skin because he realized, hey, we've made a stench of ourselves here.

Odds are good the other cities are going to come after us. God says, no, I'm going to protect you. As you follow me in obedience, we've talked about this before, as you follow me in obedience, I'm going to give you what you need.

I haven't left you out to dry or to hang. There's one more thing on this point that I don't want us to miss, which is that in the midst of God's grace, which is real, there is also some bitterness here. There's a bitter moment in the midst of the return. I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon that we're tying up loose ends. Jacob's life over the next two chapters, I almost thought about calling the sermon loose ends, but there's one loose end that doesn't get tied up.

[19 : 19] You could easily miss it because it's a side comment, but look with me at verse eight. And Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, died. That's kind of odd.

Why are we being told about Rebecca's nurse's death? Whose death should we hear about? Rebecca.

Rebecca, his mom. We want to know what's going to happen, right? Remember when she sent him out to escape, to run from Esau because Esau had threatened to kill him. She said, I'm going to call you back. I'll let you know when it's safe so you can return home.

We've had that hanging ever since. When is Jacob and Rebecca going to be reunited? Remember, Jacob is her favorite son. She loves him so much. Rebecca's nurse died.

No mention of Rebecca. Rebecca. Presumably, we don't hear about Rebecca because Rebecca died long ago.

[20 : 30] Because of Rebecca's sin, because she tricked her husband and coached her son to do the same, she is never reunited with Jacob.

Some commentators even think her name is left out completely as an indictment on her. We don't hear about her again until the end of the book of Genesis when we're told where she was buried.

Why aren't we told that here? To remind us. Yes, grace is real. God is showing mercy to his people. He's calling them back.

Consequences are also real. Consequences of Rebecca's sin, of Jacob's sin, continue. So we hold both of those things in our hands.

There's real grace. There's real mercy for Jacob, the family of Abraham. There's also real consequences that echo throughout the generations. Rebecca never sees her favorite son again. [21 : 36] In fact, she isn't even mentioned. And so as we think about this idea of God's grace and him calling us back and his mercy, I don't want you to miss that on the one hand. But I also don't want you to grab cheap grace on the other hand and think, man, what I do doesn't matter.

No, it matters enormously. The things that we do impact us and those around us. Sometimes for generations. The good news is that it's not the end of our story.

The good news is that it doesn't get the last word. But never think, never think that sin doesn't matter. Rebecca's nurse died.

What happened to Rebecca? Consequences are real. We talked about God's faithfulness, his faithfulness and his mercy and his grace to Jacob.

Next we see God's promises. We've already talked about Rebecca's promise from chapter 27. Rebecca promised Jacob she was going to call him back when it was safe. Rebecca does not keep her promise.

[22 : 45] Rebecca never calls Jacob back home. That's chapter 27. Chapter 28, God made a promise. Remember the dream of the ladder that was from earth to heaven and the angels were climbing up and down the ladder and God comes to Jacob and he says, look, I'm going to be with you and I am going to bring you home.

What do we see now? God's protecting him, causing fear among these cities so that they don't attack. God keeps his promise.

Jacob, after all these years, after literally decades, Jacob comes home and God has been with him the whole time.

And in case we miss it, Jacob tells us that, the passage tells us that twice. twice. Verse 1, when God tells Jacob to go to Bethel, he said, make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.

Remember all the way back when I told you I would be with you, make an altar to that God. Verse 7, the same thing. And there he built an altar and called the place El Bethel because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother.

[24 : 02] God has kept his promise. God's kept his promise to be with Jacob. He's kept his promise to bring him home. Now we don't just see the keeping of past promises.

We also see the repetition of future promises, especially in this renaming. Verse 11, we're told again the same thing we saw earlier in the narrative.

Jacob's name is changed from Jacob to Israel. You'll remember Jacob means heel grabber because he grabbed Esau's heel on the way out of the womb. You'll also remember that heel grabber is a way of saying he's a dirty little cheater.

Israel means he strives with God or God strives for him. So the idea is this, that in the past, Israel was the one fighting for himself. Jacob was running to his own strength.

Now instead of Jacob fighting his battles, God fights Jacob's battles. Of course, that's what we've just seen, right? God causes the fear on these other cities because he's the one who fights for him.

[25 : 06] Now you might be wondering why are we repeating the renaming? We already saw this in chapter 32. Well, there's a few reasons. First, in chapter 32, the emphasis was on Jacob the individual.

Jacob as a person is being transformed from self-reliant to God-reliant. Now the emphasis is actually on the nation, the family as a whole. The promises he gives him are about what's going to come from Israel, kings, and nations.

That time it was an angel representing God who renamed Jacob. This time it's God himself. And this, this renaming, happens after he's returned to God's ways.

Which tells us another point, another principle of life. Blessing comes when we return. don't expect the blessing to come before you repent.

No, God loves to work through and in his people who come back to him, the ones who answer his call. It's in the coming back that we experience God's blessing.

[26:16] It's in the coming back that God sends us out in his mission. You could put it another way. Remember back in chapter 12, God gives Abraham his promise.

He says, you're going to be a blessing to the nations. Abraham was not, or Jacob was not a blessing to the nations in chapter 34. He was not blessing the nations in any way last week. No, he has to return and repent before that can happen. And then God repeats his promises. Promises made to Abraham in chapter 12, I'm going to make you a great nation.

I'll bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. Remember, God says, I'll bless those who bless you. I'll curse those who dishonor you. And you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Here, same thing. Verse 11, a nation and a company of nations shall come from you and kings shall come from your own body. Verse 12, the land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you and I will give the land to your offspring after you.

[27:26] God hasn't given up on Jacob. God still keeps his promises to Jacob. God is still going to use Jacob to fulfill his mission.

Same with us. God promises to bless us and use us when we turn back to him. That's our hope. It's our hope in the midst of failure. God is always calling us back. His promises are still good. Of course, we can see now as we look back, we see that God kept all those promises to Jacob. God did, in fact, make Jacob the father of many nations. God did, in fact, cause many kings to come from Jacob. One king more important than all the others, which is King Jesus. the one who comes and makes all of these promises true and good. And there's one thing we can't miss in this passage, it's this.

[28:35] It is all God's grace. It's part of the purpose of chapter 34. In case we missed it, in case somehow we thought that Jacob was good enough, that he had figured it out, that he pulled himself along.

The author of Genesis says, no, look at this. Look at how great he failed. God still used him. Look how much he messed up God's grace still real and true.

All because of Jesus. So that's why we sing, marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt, yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured.

there where the blood of the lamb was spilled. God's faithfulness, God's promises. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you that you are a God of mercy and grace.

That our failures don't end us if we choose repentance and faith in you. That you're always calling us back. We ask that you'd remind us of that, that you would move us to put aside our idols and our sins and to run after you.

[29:50] We ask all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.