

The Despiser and the Deceiver

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 July 2017

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 0 0] It's amazing how the readers fit the characters so well. And I think most of us know what it's like to watch someone else get ahead of you in life, get ahead of us in life.

And we wonder to ourselves, what do they have that I don't have? Or why not me? Why them? Maybe someone gets a promotion ahead of you, even though that person doesn't seem to be any more deserving than you are.

Maybe someone marries the handsome man or the beautiful girl that you have been daydreaming about. Maybe someone gets an expensive new gadget or car, clothes you could only wish for just because they happen to be born into a richer family.

Now in all of these situations, we wonder why them, why not me? And in Genesis 25 to 28, we find a similar scenario, right? So here, there's an intense struggle for supremacy between two twins.

One is chosen, the other is not. One is blessed, the other is not. And then we wonder the whole time, why him? Because they're both scoundrels, right?

[1 : 1 3] And the answer to that question lies in the truth that God saves sinful people according to his sovereign grace. Now, I'm going to unpack that through the portraits of the three main characters in this narrative.

First, we're going to look at Esau, the despiser. And second, we're going to look at Isaac, the dim-sided. And then third, we're going to look at Jacob, the deceiver.

And first, to begin with Esau, the despiser in chapter 25, verses 19 to 34. When Rebekah finally conceives, it seems it took 20 years, verse 22, it says, the children, multiple, plural, children struggle together within her.

That's a very violent word. It's used in other places in the Bible to refer to the crushing of heads. For example, Judges 9, 53. So these kids are struggling violently, all the flipping and the pushing and jostling for space within the womb.

They're already struggling violently. And so she knows, it's her first pregnancy, but she knows enough that this is not what it's supposed to be like. So she goes and consults the Lord, and the Lord reveals this to her and to Isaac in verse 23.

[2 : 2 1] Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided. The one shall be stronger than the other. The older shall serve the younger. Now, this will be what we'll see.

And then when they are born, the firstborn is named Esau because his body was covered with red hair. The alternate name for Esau is Edom, E-D-O-M. That's what he's also known as the country.

The nation he found is known as Edom. And so he's reddish. And the second son is named Jacob because he came out holding his older brother's heel. He's the heel grabber.

And this hints at the future events because grabbing someone's heel is a figurative way of deceiving someone in this culture, in this language.

So it's kind of similar to our expression of pulling someone's leg. That probably originated from someone pulling the person's leg from behind so that they trip and fall. So it came to mean to trick.

[3 : 16] So he's a leg puller. He's a deceiver. He's a heel grabber. That's who he is. Now, verses 27 to 28 tell us that when the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man dwelling in tents.

Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game. But Rebecca loved Jacob. So to summarize, Esau was an outdoorsman. Jacob was an indoorsman. Esau, you know, liked to hunt, to be in the field with the father, probably, presumably.

And Jacob was a homebody. He probably spent most of his time with his mom. Now, and Genesis 4.20, it likens dwelling in tents. It connects that to tending livestock.

So it probably means that Jacob's profession was that he's tender of livestock, which is the same as his father's profession, Isaac and Abraham. And in this, there's a comparison between, you know, Cain and Abel earlier.

Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain was a worker of the ground. And here he was a man of the ground. And here Esau describes as a man of the field. And Jacob seemingly is a keeper of livestock.

[4 : 27] Now, the fact that their different preferences divided the family is seen clearly in verse 28. It says, Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

So we're not told why Rebekah loved Jacob more, but clearly it seems that she spent more time with him. But we are told explicitly why Isaac loved Esau more. And it's because he ate of his game.

That seems to be, at least strikes me as a pretty trivial reason to favor one son over another. And so this reveals that Isaac is a gourmand, basically. He loves food, especially food freshly prepared from Esau's hunting exploits.

So Isaac is a man, and this is just painting a picture of someone who is driven by his appetite. And it turns out that he has that in common with his oldest son, Esau. And we see this in verse 30.

Esau returns from the field exhausted. He says, let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted. Jacob's cooking stew. And the red stew, another play on his name, reddish. But Jacob is curt and very calculating in his response.

[5 : 32] He's so direct. Sell me your birthright now. And the fact that Jacob is ready with that response shows that he's been premeditating. He's been waiting to exploit his older brother and to grab onto him at a moment of weakness so that he can get his birthright.

And a birthright, the firstborn's birthright, it was large. As a firstborn, you're entitled to the double portion of the father's inheritance. And so that's the claim to be the firstborn.

That's what Jacob is vying for here. And he's been competing with him since his birth, grabbing his brother's heel. He's doing the same thing here. And Esau, he should have become indignant, and he should have rebuked his younger brother for his grasping attempt.

But instead, his response is melodramatic and pathetic. He says, I'm about to die. Of what use is a birthright to me? Quite dramatic. But Jacob is a shrewd businessman, and he wants Esau to sign on the dotted line, or the equivalent.

He says, swear to me now. And so Esau does sell his birthright. And then the exchange we see in verse 34 is shocking. Because at first you thought, you know, reddish stew, it's probably some kind of meat, right?

[6 : 48] A meaty dish. But instead, this is what you find in verse 34. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew. And he ate and drank and rose and went his way.

Thus Esau despised his birthright. So it's not even a meaty stew, right? It's cheap lentil stew. And Esau sells his birthright to Jacob.

And Jacob gives Esau bread and lentil stew. It's a very uneven exchange. Imagine giving up your inheritance, maybe a car and a house, right, for a bowl of soup.

That's what's going on. And so narrator tells us how foolish this is. Because he tells us about Isaac's great exceeding wealth in chapter 26.

That's all the stuff that Esau is giving up here. Now, and the reason why it seems to be that like Isaac, his father, Esau is a sensual man. He's driven by his appetite.

[7 : 46] So he seems to be condemning that. And this is not to say enjoying food is bad, right? The Bible is overwhelmingly positive about food. Like you see Jesus feasting all the time throughout the Bible.

But it does condemn gluttony, right? And Philippians 3.19, it condemns those whose God is their belly. Romans 16.18 likewise denounces people who do not serve Christ but their own appetites.

That's another translation for the same word, belly. Which is, and so while gluttony and drunkenness therefore are always often tied together. And it refers to any kind of bodily appetite.

Hunger, thirst, sexual drive, right? And this is together condemned throughout scripture. It's whenever those appetites, their normal desires. But when they become inordinate.

When they become so large that they begin to control our life. And it begins to compete with our affection for God. To compete for our time. Our resources. The way we live. Our lifestyle.

[8 : 42] Then it becomes gluttony. It becomes sinful. It becomes idolatrous. It could be any number of things, right? Things that are not necessarily bad and honestly. It could be Red Bull, right?

It could be Coke. It could be tobacco. Sex. Marijuana. Beer. Wine. Etc. It could be just these chemical responses in your body. Dopamine.

Nicotine. Endorphins. Adrenaline. Whatever the physical or biochemical craving may be. If the desire becomes inordinate. Then it begins to control us.

Then we become gluttonous. Now, but being gluttonous is not just about being overly desirous of our bodily appetites. But it's also being overly particular in our appetites.

The Bible warns us repeatedly about being overly concerned about food. So Paul tells the Corinthians church who are too concerned about food and what types of food they should eat. In 1 Corinthians 8.8. Food will not commend us to God.

[9 : 40] And in Romans 14.17. Paul tells us not to offend another believer's conscience for the sake of food. He says, The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Similar thing, 1 Corinthians 6.13 tells us, Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food. And God will destroy both one and the other. So what it's saying is that when we're overly concerned about our bodily appetites, satisfying them about food or whatever it may be, it's a sign of worldliness, of overly being concerned about the things of this world and not being heavenly minded.

C.S. Lewis, as usual, has a very helpful illustration about this in his book, Screwtape Letters. In the book, the Screwtape, a senior devil advises the junior devil, Wormwood, about using gluttony to tempt people.

And he says this. He distinguishes gluttony of delicacy from gluttony of access. And then he cites as an example of this persnickety old woman who is given to gluttony of delicacy.

He says this. This woman is always turning from what has been offered her to say with a demure little sigh and a smile, Oh, please, please, all I want is a cup of tea, weak but not too weak, and the teeniest, weeniest bit of really crisp toast.

[10 : 55] And then Screwtape explains, You see, because what she wants is smaller and less costly than what has been said before her, she never recognizes as gluttony her determination to get what she wants.

However troublesome it may be to others. At the very moment of indulging her appetite, she believes that she is practicing temperance, being overly particular about our appetite.

So whether it's as a health guru or as a connoisseur of fine dining, if we're overly concerned about our bodily appetite satisfyingly, if our life is consumed and preoccupied with those things, it reflects an ungodly concern.

Now, not only is Esau guilty of this, we see this, we see later that Isaac fits this description. He's also a sensuous and pleasure-seeking man. Because it's not only does Isaac favor Esau just because he eats of his game, he says that he seems to offer his blessing on the condition of eating that game.

He tells him to bring this game, and then I will bless you. And he says repeatedly he's craving delicious food. Six times it says he's craving delicious food. And then it says three times he wants the food specifically prepared, such as he loves.

[12 : 12] And this is all the more remarkable because the word delicious food is actually a very rare word. It only occurs one other time in the entire Old Testament. And that's in Proverbs 23 where it speaks of how delicacies or delicious food can be used to ensnare people.

It can be deceptive food. So now, like his father Isaac is sensuous given to this. And now if you're following with me up to this point, you're probably saying to yourself, well, come on, like gluttony, really?

Like is that really so bad? But I want to ask you, look at what happens, the power that it wields on Isaac's life and on Esau's life so that they're driven to these things.

And Pastor John Piper writes loosely about this in his book, A Hunger for God. He argues, The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie.

It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven but endless nibbling at the table of the world. The greatest adversary of love to God is not his enemies but his gifts.

[13 : 20] And the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil but for the simple pleasures of earth. For when these replace an appetite for God himself, the idolatry is scarcely recognizable and almost incurable.

Do you guys see the insidiousness of gluttony, of the sin? Because it's because it seems so innocent, because it seems so simple, just pleasures, the things that God has given us, when they begin to grow inordinate, when they begin to control our lives, it's almost, we don't recognize it.

It takes over. So we have to look at it and take stock of our lives. If we examine our lives, if we look at our spending habits, if we look at the way we spend our time, if we look at what orders our life, what's the constraining center of our life, if it's something other than God, that means our life is disordered, and it will ultimately lead to dissatisfaction and idolatry.

And that's why fasting is a helpful discipline, right? We do this every month. Three days of prayer and fasting, we'll be doing it this week. A lot of you can participate in that, because not only is it great in assisting with prayer, it's a great discipline for reining in our appetites, our bodily appetites.

They're all connected. People from, you know, John Calvin to Thomas Kemp has all noted the impact, the effectiveness of fasting and reining in the fleshly appetites. As one recent writer puts it, our human cravings and desires are like rivers that tend to overflow their banks.

[14 : 43] Fasting helps keep them in their proper channels. Now, so then when we come to face these desires, these bodily appetites, when we are tempted to choose those things and to live for those things over living for God, then we have to remind ourselves that's just lentil stew, just a bowl of soup.

And we are trading away the eternal delights of being with the Lord and focusing on Him and pursuing Him. The warning from Hebrews 12, 15 to 17 is appropriate.

He's a seed to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God, that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.

For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. Sin always grows, and Jesus warned us about the effect of the cares of this world, the riches choking out our plants, the gospel seed that's planted in us.

So we need to be wary of the sin. In this Esau's example, Esau the despiser is helpful. Then in chapter 26, we take a brief break from the story of Jacob and Esau, and we get a glimpse into the life of Isaac, the dim-sided.

[16 : 02] And this account of Isaac in Genesis 26 very closely follows the career of Abraham. It almost reads exactly the same way that Abraham's journey takes place.

So, for example, compare chapter 26 here about Isaac to chapter 20 and 21 about Abraham. They both try to pass off their wife as their sister for the sake of self-preservation. They both engage in a dispute about wells, who has access to these wells with the Philistines.

They both encounter Abimelech, the king of Gerar and ruler of Philistines, and Fickel, the commander of his army. And to both of the patriarchs, Abimelech acknowledges, the Lord has been with you, right?

And then so they seek a treaty, a covenant, to make sure that there's good will between them for the future. And then in both of them also, they name a well Beersheba, or Sheba, which Beersheba just means well of the oath.

And like Abraham before him, Isaac also expresses his faith to God and gratefulness to God by building an altar. And why are there all these parallels? These parallels are there to show us that God's promise to Abraham is continuing through Isaac.

[17 : 11] So Isaac is heir to all of these blessings and covenant promises that God made to him. And so then, because there's all these parallels, the one notable departure at the end of this chapter is really jarring.

And that's the narrator's intention. Because if you look at verse 34 to 35, it says, When Esau was 40 years old, he took Judith, the daughter of Beerli the Hittite, to be his wife, and Basemath, the daughter of Elah the Hittite.

And they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah. Note the age at which this happens. Esau was 40 years old when he took these foreign wives. Isaac was 40 years old when Abraham sent his servant out to find a wife from among his own kindred for Isaac so that they could preserve the faith, so that they would not be led astray by foreign wives who worshipped foreign gods.

And so this is a very marked difference, and it's intentionally placed here to highlight the difference between Abraham and Isaac. So Isaac follows in his footsteps, except when it comes to this.

And it seems that he never even confronted Esau about it when he married these two. And it's shocking, right, that Abraham was so concerned that Isaac wouldn't even marry one woman from Canaan. And Esau goes and marries two of them.

[18 : 29] And it seems that Isaac hasn't even confronted Esau about it. Because later, when Rebekah brings this issue up, Esau says he first learned. He learns at that point that Isaac was displeased by his foreign wives.

So it seems maybe they had a really good relationship, or Isaac didn't want to bother with confronting him about it. It seems Isaac was passive and derelict in his duty to lead him. And so this unfavorable description of Isaac continues in chapter 27, verse 1.

It says, When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, right? So the health of the eyes is indicative of general health throughout Scripture. So it describes Moses' health in Deuteronomy 34, 7.

It says his eyes were undimmed. So here, the fact that Isaac's eyes are dim is not a good sign. It's not a good sign of blessing. It may be also an indication, a metaphor perhaps, for his spiritual deterioration of loss of vision for him, not just physically but spiritually.

And you see this more clearly as he begins to speak to Esau. He called Esau, his older son, and said to him, My son. And he answered, Here I am. He said, Behold, I am old. I do not know the day of my death.

[19 : 40] Now then take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me. And prepare for me delicious food such as I love. And bring it to me so that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.

Now in order to understand this, we have to recognize that this scene is a type scene, meaning that it's a scene that is often used throughout ancient Near Eastern literature. It's a deathbed blessing scene.

And when the writers of the Bible, Old Testament, they use a type scene, they were inviting a comparison and contrast between the conventional things that happen and what happens here in order to make some important points.

And while it has similarities, there's some really important deviations from the conventional way which a patriarch blessed on his deathbed. First, the great man usually knows exactly when he's about to die.

But Isaac has no idea. He says, I don't know when I'm gonna die. So that's again, maybe a hint that he's losing sight, he's losing grasp spiritually. Second, usually in a deathbed blessing type scene, the patriarch calls all of his sons to bless them and has blessings for each of them.

[20 : 46] But here Isaac calls just his older son Esau. So he is intentionally flaunting God's will even though God had predicted, he said the older will serve the younger, essentially saying that Jacob will inherit the rights to the firstborn.

But here he flaunts the will of God, the revealed will of God. And he overlooks the fact that Esau has married this foreign woman. And then he totally ignores Jacob and wants to bless Esau alone.

And then third, this whole thing about asking Esau to hunt game, that's totally foreign to this type scene. So it shows again, once again, his sensuality. And this is a great example and a good warning to parents in the room, right?

I mean, look at what happens throughout the story, right? Abraham passes his wife off as his sister. Isaac does the exact same thing. And here Isaac deceives for the sake of self-advancement.

Jacob, his son, deceives for the sake of self-advancement, right? Isaac is a sensuous man and he for a bowl of soup, he will bless his son, the wrong son, the son he did not intend to bless.

[21 : 53] And the same way, Esau gives away his birthright for a bowl of soup, right? So this, again, happens. There's a lot of influence that parents have over their children and we see that clearly.

And it's our responsibility as parents to make sure that we speak the truth and love to our children, to discipline them when necessary, right? And to bring them up and to address sin in their lives.

And this doesn't just apply to parents, but to all of us because we are the family of God, to every member of the church. And it's our responsibility, it's the responsibility of more mature believers in the church to confront sin in the lives of those who are less mature, those who are straying away from God.

And in our context, we avoid this. We're scared of this because we're worried that, oh, they're going to think we're judgmental. We're afraid that this is going to bring attention to us and of course, we're not perfect and I don't want the spotlight on me, right?

So that's our attitude and we don't talk about sin. But James 5, 19 to 20 says, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

[23 : 06] Right? We're saving a soul from death when we recover a sinner from the path of sin. So then when we say to ourselves, oh, we can't delude ourselves into thinking we're being polite when we refuse to address sin in each other's lives.

We're not being polite. We're being positively unloving. We're not being careful. We're being uncaring about these people. Of course, we have to exercise love and humility.

We need to first examine our own sins and be ready to confront our own sins when we approach other believers. We need to come in love. We need to come not for the sake of judging and for condemning, but for the sake of love so that we can grow together.

We need to come with wisdom, right? Not bringing everything all at once, but we do it one at a time and we find the right time and opportunity for it. And we make sure to take into account that person's good things, the things that that person does well, and perhaps the difficult circumstances that may mitigate the sins that they have committed.

So we do all of these things, yes, to make sure we do it wisely, but we still have to do it. We are called as a church, as the family of God. We're responsible for each other.

[24 : 17] Now, even though Isaac, so that's Isaac the dim-sided, and even though Isaac intended to bless Esau only, Rebecca, who was very shrewd and industrious, as we've found out before, is not about to be outmaneuvered.

And so she intervenes on behalf of her favorite son, Jacob, and now we turn to the final point, Jacob the deceiver. Read verses five to six with me. It says, Now Rebecca was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau.

So when Esau went to the field to hunt for a game and bring it, Rebecca said to her son, Jacob. Notice how Esau is described as his son, right?

And Jacob is described as her son, right? This highlights the alienation, the rift within the family. Isaac is behaving as if Esau is his only son, and Rebecca is behaving as if Jacob is her only son.

And so she comes up with this ruse to have Jacob act like Esau to go in his place and intercept the blessing that's about to fall on the older sibling.

[25 : 23] And when Jacob goes to deceive Isaac, Isaac asks a series of questions. This is really dramatic and fun to read with just this rising tension. And with each question, he ends with the probing word, my son, as if he's wondering if this is really his son, the son that he loves.

So first, he said, Who are you, my son? And second, How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son? Third, and please come near that I may feel you, my son. And then it almost seems like he's about to be discovered, right?

He's just, he recognizes that this is Jacob's voice, but he has Esau's hands. And so Isaac doesn't quite recognize it. And when he smells the clothes of Esau that Jacob had put on, he does bless Jacob instead of Esau.

And oh, when Esau comes back, it's such a sad, sad and poignant, that paragraph. It's with so much emotion. And you can't help but feel for him, right?

He just cries out. This is a real person. He lost his birthright. Now he loses his blessing. And so he yells out, he cries out, he says, Oh, isn't he rightly named Jacob?

[26 : 34] For he has cheated me these two times. The word cheat is a pawn on Jacob's name. It looks like the name Jacob, spelled like the name Jacob. And he emphasized that he took it from him twice.

He took away my birthright. And now he has taken away my blessing. Jacob, the deceiver, right? He's a cheater. And he is a taker. And because Isaac was not blessing his sons conventionally, but was intending only to bless Esau, now there's nothing left when Jacob takes Esau's blessing for Esau.

And his blessing almost reads like a curse, right? So there's nothing left for him. And unsurprisingly, Esau holds a grudge and like Cain, wants to kill his brother.

And so Rebecca intervenes again to send him off so that he could find a wife. And it seems like because this narrative begins and ends with the story about Esau's foreign wives, that seems to be the main human reason that is given for Esau's being disinherited.

And now, so Jacob gets sent out so that he can find a proper wife, a wife that can help him to serve and to continue the promises of God. And as Isaac blesses him, he says in verses 3 to 4 of chapter 28, God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you that you may become a company of souls and give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham.

[28 : 08] Now, you probably recognize a lot of the words here because it's almost verbatim, right, like what the blessings that God had given to Abraham. And so this is highlighting the fact that what the blessing that Jacob received earlier from Isaac, the blessing that he finagled to get, right, that's not the blessing of Abraham.

This is the blessing of Abraham. He's, you know, acting frantically, trying to get everything and acquire everything so that he could advance himself. But this blessing, the amazing covenant of God with Abraham, comes to him, right, he doesn't have to, he's not the, he doesn't have to deceive in order to get it.

And then when God appears to him, he confirms these promises in chapter 28, verses 13 to 15. And so this brings us back to the question we asked.

This cheating, swindling fellow is the designator of Abraham's promises. Why? What makes Jacob so much better and more deserving than Esau?

Yeah, Esau despised his birthright, but Jacob, he deceived his own father and defrauded his own brother. What makes him so special? And the answer to the question, as I said in the beginning, is God saves sinful people according to his sovereign grace.

[29 : 31] In Romans 9, Paul answers a quandary that faced first century Christians because he asks, why did so many of the Jews, God's chosen people, reject the Messiah he sent, Jesus Christ?

Why don't they believe in Jesus? Did God's promise to God's people, Israel, fail? And Paul answers this question by saying this. He says, no, it has not failed for not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring.

But through Isaac shall your offspring be named. This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. You guys following his argument?

He's saying basically, you know what, it's Abraham had more than one son, but only Isaac is the offspring through whom his promise is fulfilled. So that shows us that this promise is given not to the fleshly descendants, the biological descendants, but to the spiritual descendants of Abraham.

And so then Paul's argument is, it's not the ethnic Jews who are the exclusive heirs to God's promise, but it's all those who have faith in Jesus, who believe in him, are heirs to the Abrahamic promise.

[30 : 41] And he uses then the example of Jacob and Esau to prove his point in chapter 9 of Romans verses 10 to 16. He says, When Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing, either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works, but because of him who calls, she was told, the older will serve the younger.

As it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means, for he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.

So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy. To put it simply, why did God choose Jacob?

Not because Jacob was more deserving, but because of his sovereign grace, because he chose to show grace to Jacob in his sovereign wisdom and will.

Just as it is the donor's prerogative to choose which charity he gives his money to, he gives his wealth away to, it's God's prerogative to choose who he gives his grace to.

[31 : 57] And we wonder, why doesn't just God make this a free-for-all? Make every man, every woman compete for his grace, his gift. So may the best man win, may the best woman win, whoever obeys the best, whoever believes the most, whoever does the most good things on earth, why doesn't he make them, why doesn't he give them good gifts?

And this is the reason, he says, because, so that it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy. Because if the grace of God is a wage that we earn through our efforts, then who gets the credit and who gets the glory?

The worker. He earned it. It's his, rightfully his. He gets all the glory. But if God gives his grace freely, if he gives, not because it's earned, but he gives it as a gift, then who gets the glory?

God does, because it's his generosity that's highlighted, not our industriousness, not our obedience, not our good deeds, not our incredible intelligence. That's the reason why God saves sinful people according to his sovereign grace.

And how did God carry out that plan? How did God save people? He did it through Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. He did it through David and Solomon.

[33 : 17] He did it through Joseph and Mary. Through these sinful people, the sinless son of man, Jesus Christ, was born. He was son of man and son of God. And he is uniquely able to save us because he says in John 1.51, he alludes to this dream that Jacob had above the ladder of the angels going up and down the ladder connecting heaven to earth.

And he says this about himself, truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man. That's him.

That's Jesus. He's the son of man. What he's saying then is this, I am the ladder that connects heaven to earth. I am Bethel, the house of God through which you can come to know God and to worship God.

And why is Jesus able to do that? Because he is the son of man so he can represent humanity and he's also the son of God so he can represent God. And because of that he can die for our sins as his atoning sacrifice and lift sinners of earth to heaven through his death and resurrection.

That's what Jesus does. That's how he saves us by his sovereign grace. If you're not yet a follower of Jesus, if this is new to you, right, then you have probably at some point in your life looked around at Christians and said to yourself, who do they think they are?

[34 : 35] They think they're so much better than me. They think they're going to heaven and I'm going to hell. But I'm here to tell you that we don't think that we're so much better than you. We really don't.

We believe that we're saved not because we deserve it or because we're better than anyone else but because of God's sovereign grace. We believe that he gets all the credit not us. And this is what it means to be chosen by God.

This is how you can know that you're chosen by God. humble yourself. Acknowledge your need and your sinfulness and say I need Jesus, his atoning sacrifice so that I can be cleansed, so that I can be lifted up to the presence of God.

That's what it is and when you believe that, when you cling to Christ, that means you're part of his chosen people. And if you're already a Christian then the gospel should be a source of great peace and assurance for us.

Maybe you're a little bit like Jacob, the deceiver. I can identify with Jacob probably more than any other character in this story. Maybe your life is wracked by fear and anxiety.

[35 : 37] You're always plotting and planning, worrying and stressing and running around and getting things done. Maybe you're always thinking about, you know, worried about saying the right things and doing the right things because if you don't, you think that everything's going to be ruined.

It's going to be messed up. Maybe you're so fearful of messing things up that you're paralyzed, you're indecisive. Or maybe you have messed things up and then now you're taking a sledgehammer to yourself with guilt, condemnation.

Jacob's story teaches us that no matter how frantically you try to control every aspect of your life, you are not the master of your own fate. The Lord is. And like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, we will fail and we will fall.

But through it all, if you have entrusted your life to God, you can know that God's good plan for you, his sovereign will will prevail. No human weakness can thwart the will of the sovereign God.

So then, rest in Jesus if you're a Christian. I ask you. Rest in him. Entrust yourself to him. Because God saves sinful people according to his sovereign grace. Let's pray together.

[37 : 07] God, we're so grateful that you have made salvation up to you and your grace and not up to us and our works. stranger to here.

Because if your course of justice had its way, we should not know salvation. No one can save themselves.

No one is good enough. So we thank you for your grace. We thank you for your mercy, that you have saved us and that it does not depend an iota on our will or exertion, but on your grace and mercy. We give you all the praise. Help us to live in light of that, and may that truth free us. Help us to live in your grace and in faith in your sovereignty, not in guilt, condemnation, and a frantic attempt to control our lives and our environment and our surroundings. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.