Jacob

A grasping patriarch, absurd blessings, and the one thing God will not take by force

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, October 31, 2021
PASSAGES	Genesis 27:1-40; Genesis 25:21-34; Genesis 32:22-30; Genesis 29:15-30; Genesis 30:25-43; Leviticus 18:18; Hosea 12:3-4
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:28:54 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Jacob is the strangest of the patriarchs — a grasper and a schemer whose blessings make no sense — and that is exactly why he pictures the church so well. He was blessed standing in another's place, dressed in another's clothes, covered in the skins of a slain animal, while someone else did the work and took the curse. And the God who wrestled him all night without forcing him wants the one thing he will not take: a willing heart.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Reading something in Scripture does not mean the person who did it was excellent. Jacob is often "a weird, creepy guy," and God blessed him anyway.
- Barrenness runs through the patriarchs' wives. God was making a people out of thin air, by his Spirit and not by human power.
- Jacob's life is a series of absurd blessings — a birthright for a bowl of stew, a stolen blessing, speckled flocks from striped sticks.
- Rebekah is the mastermind of the stolen blessing. She did the work, dressed Jacob, and said, "Let your curse be on me."
- Jacob was blessed in another's place, covered by another's work. So are we, hidden in Christ.
- Sometimes God comes to a frightened man in the night not to comfort him but to fight him. We don't grow strong on sweets alone.

- There is one way we can "win" against God: by withholding our wills. And our willing hearts are the one thing he most wants.

▶ 1:29:37

Before preaching, Matt honored Amber LaRoche, principal of Brentwood Elementary for over six years and a friend of the church through Good News Club, as she moved to a new role at Region 13. She asked Hope to keep praying over the school as it is rebuilt across the street, and Whitney Crowley prayed a blessing over her. Then Matt turned to Jacob.

The weirdest of the three

▶ 1:36:26

The series has been running through major figures of the Old Testament because these are God's stories, and "what they do more than anything is tell us about what kind of God we love and worship." In Amy's Abraham message, Abraham played the father in a drama and Isaac the miracle son offered up.

▶ 1:37:36

Jacob, renamed Israel, stands in many ways for the people of God; a whole nation is named after him. "I think it's also fitting that out of these three patriarchs, Israel slash Jacob, playing in this drama a prefiguring of the church, is also one of the weirdest of the three — at times kind of a weird, creepy guy. And I think that's fitting for us." A reminder, then: "When you read something in the Scriptures, that doesn't mean that the thing that that person did was excellent."

Fighting before they were born

▶ 1:38:53

Isaac prays for Rebekah because she is barren. Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel all struggled to have children. A line through which God would create a people "out of thin air" is marked by barrenness, and Matt heard a message in it: "this whole project, from beginning to end, will be accomplished by his Spirit, not by our power."

▶ 1:39:57

> "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."
>
> GENESIS 25:21–26 ↗

The twins are already fighting in the womb, and God has already said the younger will rule. Esau comes out red and hairy; Jacob follows grasping his heel — heel-grabber, supplanter. Esau grows into a hunter, Isaac's favorite for the game he brings; quiet Jacob stays among the tents, and Rebekah loves him. The rivalry becomes a family division.

▶ 1:41:01

Esau comes in exhausted and wants the red stew; Jacob says, sell me your birthright (Genesis 25:29–34). Don't picture one tent and sand, Matt said. Abraham had men enough to rescue Lot, and Isaac inherited it all; the birthright meant a chieftain's company of people and flocks. "I can't believe that worked. But it did" — the first in a series of absurd blessings that is part of Jacob's role in the drama.

Mom's plan

▶ 1:42:32

Isaac is old and blind — "try to keep that in your mind" — and sends Esau to hunt game so he can bless him before he dies. Rebekah is eavesdropping, and the scheme that follows is hers: "Obey my voice as I command you" (Genesis 27:1–10). Buying the birthright was Jacob's idea. "He's not the brains of this particular operation."

▶ 1:44:05

Does Jacob protest that it is wrong? No — he protests that it won't work:

> "Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing." His mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice."
>
> GENESIS 27:11–13 ↗

▶ 1:45:13

Jacob fetches two goats, "and that's pretty much all Jacob does." Rebekah cooks the food, takes Esau's best garments and puts them on him, and covers his hands and neck with goatskins — probably

rushed, perhaps not thoroughly cleaned. “I don’t know if you saw this towering figure of Mom before, but I hope you see it now. She did all the work.”

▶ 1:46:16

Asked how he found game so quickly, Jacob says, “Because the LORD your God granted me success.” “That’s just a lie. We’re just straight up lying now.” Isaac is blind, not deaf: “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” He blesses him anyway — including “be lord over your brothers,” odd if he knew God’s word to Rebekah.

▶ 1:47:52

Then the tragic part. Esau arrives just after, and Isaac trembles violently.

> “As soon as Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry and said to his father, ‘Bless me, even me also, O my father!’”
>
> GENESIS 27:30–38 ↗

▶ 1:48:59

“Can you hear the pain?” And it turns darker: Esau resolves to kill Jacob once their father dies. Rebekah sends Jacob away under cover of finding a wife, and Isaac blesses him a second time with the blessing of Abraham (Genesis 28:1–4). On the way, Jacob dreams of a stairway with angels ascending and descending, and God repeats the promise to him; he wakes saying this is the house of God “and I did not know it” (Genesis 28:12–17).

The deceiver deceived

▶ 1:51:15

Jacob works seven years for Rachel, and in the evening Laban brings Leah instead.

▶ 1:51:49

> “And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, ‘What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?’”
>
> GENESIS 29:23–25 ↗

▶ 1:52:24

"Jacob's real upset that someone deceived him. That is rich, Jacob." It is the same trick: a man in the dark and a sibling switcheroo. Then it was Jacob and his mother; now Leah and her father — "this odd intergenerational collusion for odd behavior."

▶ 1:54:02

Lisette had covered the sisters and their sons, so Matt skipped ahead, but noted for conscience's sake that the law of Moses forbids exactly what Jacob did: "You shall not take a woman as a rival wife to her sister" (Leviticus 18:18). "I read this story and I think, wow, God does bless creepy, weird people. And that's actually kind of encouraging, because I wouldn't say I'm much better. God has room for me."

Striped sticks and stolen flocks

▶ 1:54:40

When Jacob asks to go home, Laban admits he has learned by divination that God blessed him because of Jacob, and tells him to name his wages. Jacob asks for the speckled, spotted and black animals; that same day Laban removes them all and sends them off with his sons (Genesis 30:25–43). "I would say this whole in-law relationship's going really well."

▶ 1:56:19

Jacob responds by peeling striped patterns into branches at the watering troughs so the strong animals breed speckled young — "which, I don't know if you knew this, is not a ranching principle." Yet the flocks come out speckled. "Here is another time where God blesses him beyond what he deserves, or beyond what even makes sense."

▶ 1:57:58

Laban's sons see their inheritance shrinking and resent him, much as Esau did; "Jacob has this pattern of driving people nuts around him." Jacob says Laban has changed his wages ten times. God tells him to return to his kindred, and he slips away while Laban is shearing sheep (Genesis 31:3).

▶ 1:59:59

Laban pursues for seven days: why did you trick me? I would have sent you off "with mirth and songs, with tambourine" — "I somehow feel like there wasn't going to be the warmest of parties." "Is this trickster upset that the trickster tricked him? Who are you rooting for here? Neither one." Laban adds, "It is in my power to do you harm," but God had warned him, and they part ways.

God comes and fights him

▶ 2:00:37

Heading home, Jacob sends gifts ahead to feel out Esau's heart. The messengers return: "He is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him" (Genesis 32:6–8). Esau is a chieftain too — "not just his 400 yokel friends down the road." Jacob is greatly afraid, splits his people into two camps to cut his losses, and crosses the Jabbok. At night he is left alone.

▶ 2:02:30

"It's often the case that we want the sweet things of the Lord — the nurture, the affirmation. But in this story, when this man is deeply afraid and he's all alone … in the middle of the night God comes and fights him. That's not the kind of thing you put on a throw pillow." We tell our kids they can't live on candy; spiritually, too, there are things that nourish us without going down easy. Scripture shows God comforting, and it also shows him rebuking and fighting — here, literally wrestling.

▶ 2:03:34

> "And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day has broken.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' … Then he said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.'"
>
> GENESIS 32:24–29 ↗

From this story and Hosea 12:3–4 we know the man is God. A touch was all it took to put Jacob's hip out, "which means he was reserving and holding back his power that whole time."

▶ 2:04:28

Another absurd blessing: Jacob wrestles God, and God does not destroy him. "He always seems to be fighting for blessings — pinching and grabbing and taking. What a great type for us in the great drama of Scripture."

Blessed in another's place

▶ 2:05:10

Jacob deserved no blessing by birth or by deeds. He dressed up as his brother. Someone else accepted the curse on his behalf before it could fall, did all the work, outfitted him and covered him in goatskins, "and he was blessed standing in the place that was somebody else's."

▶ 2:05:45

> *"We are covered by the skin, basically, of an animal that was killed for this to happen. We are clothed with another's raiment. Another did all the work, and another said, I will take the curse."*

▶ 2:06:24

"We are just like that: hidden in Christ, disguised as Christ in a way, covered in what only could have happened because of his death." Jacob escaped death again and again by God's absurd blessings, and his schemes made no sense. "We didn't deserve one bit of forgiveness in Christ, but his blood is sufficient. He's the one who deserved it, and we stood in his place."

The one thing God won't take

▶ 2:07:00

Why would God wrestle Jacob at all? Not a test of wits or a feat of strength. There is one dimension in which we can wrestle with God and win, "and that is with our wills." He could have pinned Jacob in seconds; instead he wrestled all night — "have you ever wrestled with anyone for more than ten minutes?"

▶ 2:08:08

"He's not going to force you to submit to him willingly." So Matt's encouragement was to give yourself to God willingly — to obey because you want to, not because he comes and takes it. Could he? Yes. "What does he want, though? He wants the thing that he won't take: a willing heart, a desire to obey." He doesn't need our goats, our money, our houses. "At the end of the day, that's all we really have to offer."

▶ 2:09:23

And this is not a template for asking, "Am I in a Jacob phase or an Abraham phase?" These are real stories, part of one long story of God pursuing, wooing and revealing himself. "It's not cyclical, it's linear. It's progressing." It is going toward the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9), "where we, like his bride, give him ourselves willingly."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Genesis 25:21–26
- Genesis 25:29–34
- Genesis 27:1–10
- Genesis 27:11–13
- Genesis 27:30–38
- Genesis 28:1–4
- Genesis 28:12–17
- Genesis 29:23–25
- Leviticus 18:18
- Genesis 30:25–43
- Genesis 31:3
- Genesis 32:6–8
- Genesis 32:24–29
- Hosea 12:3–4
- Revelation 19:9

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt said Jacob is “kind of a weird, creepy guy,” and that this is fitting for the church. Why might that be encouraging rather than embarrassing?
2. What strikes you about Rebekah’s role — doing all the work and saying “Let your curse be on me”?
3. Jacob’s blessings repeatedly made no sense. Where have you received a blessing you know you didn’t earn?
4. When has God met you not with comfort but with a fight, and what grew in you because of it?
5. Where are you still holding your will back from God, and what would it look like this week to give him a willing heart?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel’s senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church’s governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope’s own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOjn-NNbJ8c&t=5334s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.