

God's Plan Wins through the Utter Carnage of Sin

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Preacher: Joe Hall

[0 : 00] Do you ever look at our world and groan? Wars grind on in the Middle East and in Europe, an assassination attempt in America, violence and disorder on our own streets.

The world looks so bleak, doesn't it, and doesn't seem to be getting any better. Often, though, the things that really make us cry are the things that go on in our own homes, things, strained marriages, difficult children, aging parents, perhaps loneliness, friendships that weren't as close as they used to be.

Sometimes things happen in our world and in our families and lives that make us wonder, how could God possibly be at work here?

We find ourselves 100 feet down in twisting tunnels of brokenness and the light doesn't seem to reach down here. We've squeezed and crawled through so many layers and layers of hurt and confusion and sin as humanity, as families, personally, through so many years, decades, centuries, and we wonder if there is still a way back out.

When our own sin and the collective sin of our world bears down on us, it can squeeze the hope clean out of us, can't it? And we wonder, how could God possibly be at work in our world, our families, our lives?

[1 : 40] Friends, today we've opened our Bibles to the story of one of the most broken families ever to have a book written about them. You thought you knew how messed up families could be, and then you read the Bible, and you discovered a family that puts the rest of us in the shade, doesn't it?

The last time the king of the Philistines discovered that when this family moves in next door, they may well bring a curse down on you. But turn the page, fast forward to the present, and we find that that's not the half of it.

If you're confused after our long reading about who you're meant to be happy for, who you're meant to be sorry for, that's a good thing, because there is no person in this chapter who comes out of it clean.

Chapters like this in the Bible pull the rug out of that common way of reading Scripture that we have, don't we? Maybe especially Old Testament stories, which is to ask, what moral lessons can I learn from these people's lives?

Or whose example should I follow? I'd love to hear someone preach a sermon on this chapter about how to be a better person, because these are all terrible human beings.

[3 : 03] They are all at it, all playing games. And yet, by the end, what has happened is exactly what God said would happen.

It's really important we see this. So turn back with me in your Bible to 25 verse 23. See this? 25 verse 23, the Lord said to Rebecca, two nations are in your womb and two peoples from within you will be separated.

One people will be stronger than the other and the older will serve the younger. Against every norm of human society and culture, Jacob will come first, Esau will come last.

How could God be at work in this family? But he is. He is. You might not understand God's plan, but we can see his plan at work, can't we?

God's plan wins through the utter carnage of sin. And we can take great confidence in that today, brothers and sisters, because as fallen as our world and our lives truly are, God's plan isn't finished yet.

[4 : 26] And he is the same today as he was then. His plan still wins through the utter carnage of sin.

And that's really the only point in our passage. So for the rest of our time, let's simply see that together and apply it to ourselves. First, the utter carnage of sin.

And now for us just to see how rotten this whole thing is, it helps to know what was normal back then, right? You know, I guess if you've grown up in a difficult family, it's hard to know what a healthy family feels like.

Maybe until you go over to your friend's house for dinner, or you start getting to know your boyfriend's or your girlfriend's family a bit. I know for some of you, becoming part of the church here has been a bit like that.

You've said to me, it feels more like a family than my own family. God's family should feel like the family we didn't know that we always wanted.

[5 : 29] So what should a healthy family feel like in the time of Genesis when Dad is on his deathbed? One writer pointed out in the week that compared to Abraham's dying wishes, Isaac's dying wishes are way out of sync.

Back in chapter 24, when Abraham knew his time was coming, he sent Isaac back home to find a wife from the family and not from the land. That's important because God promised to bless this family and through them the rest of the world.

Right? So Abraham's dying wish was for God's plan to carry on into the next generation. But Isaac doesn't seem to care to see that his firstborn was married to not one but two women from Hittite families, Judith and Basimath.

Basimath. We're not told how they were a source of grief but clearly it was less in principle and more in practice because Isaac is still fully intending to give Esau God's blessing.

Now if that wasn't enough of a red flag, the fact that Isaac only wants Esau when he gives his blessing should set the warning lights off on the dashboard because it would have been expected for a dying dad to call the whole family to the bedside to go through his will.

[7 : 03] The firstborn would have normally got the lion's share but all his children would normally have been blessed with something. But Isaac wants it all tied up neatly with his older son.

Understand, he is writing Jacob out of his will even though God promised it would be the other way round. Isaac must have known that but he has other ideas.

And the alarm bells start ringing wildly when he offers that lifetime deal to Esau on one condition, verse 4, prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat so that I may give you my blessing before I die.

Like father, like son, right? He'll make or break a life as long as it comes with a steaming bowl of stew. Isaac is ruled by his stomach just like Esau was when he forfeited the very inheritance Isaac is now holding out to him.

Now does that does that help us to see how what at first seems like a fairly normal family interaction is actually part of a deeply twisted family dynamic?

[8 : 25] Isaac's words betray him as a dad who holds God's purposes lightly and plays the system so that daddy's boy gets everything and mummy's boy loses out.

At first glance it's easy, isn't it, for us to feel sorry for Isaac and Esau but really they're undone in the end because their horrible plan is foiled.

And yet we don't come out of it feeling happy for Rebecca and Jacob either, do we? Rebecca overhears Isaac's whispered plan and makes her own dark plan to get her boy Jacob the blessing in disguise.

Notice the way she slightly changes what Isaac said she leaves out a bit about hunting and puts in a bit about the presence of the Lord. That doesn't seem like much but who else has done that very thing in this same book to trick somebody into following a bad plan?

And when that person said it's too risky said oh don't worry there are no bad consequences. If dad finds out says Jacob I'll bring it down a curse on myself rather than a blessing.

[9 : 43] Can you hear the hiss in Rebecca's answer? You will not surely die. Let the curse fall on me just do what I say.

She can't take the consequences for Jacob if it goes wrong so what is she really saying? Forget the consequences just do it. Friends where else in this book have we seen someone fed a wicked lie wrapped in tasty tempting food?

Notice how the story slows down in verse 25 it's a Genesis way of saying look here Isaac said my son bring me some of your game to eat so that I may give you my blessing.

Jacob brought it to him and he ate he brought some wine and he drank. There's a serpent in the garden there is a dragon in the stable and his voice echoes down through the whole story between now and then that old old lie you're missing out.

You can have it all your way there are no bad consequences and it will be better than God's blessing. What's shocking here is that the whole sickening drama is playing out on the surface of God's family.

[11 : 10] You see it's Genesis 3 with a new cast the serpent tempted Eve who took the food gave it to the man and he ate only to discover it was all a lie. Now Rebecca tempts Jacob who takes the food gives it to Isaac who eats only to discover it was all a lie.

Friends can we see how deeply that first lie has corrupted the heart of this family God's family as if they can't stop reliving it history repeats itself time and time again in their lives they are trapped in its circular jaws but in a way it gets worse every time doesn't it at least back in chapter 3 we knew whose side we were on now things have got so bad we're not sure anymore who's the woman's offspring and who's the serpents are we team Jacob or team Esau are we meant to learn from Isaac's example or from Rebecca's friends neither Rebecca speaks serpent in this chapter and Isaac is the spitting image of his father Adam both sons are in on terrible plans they've been deeply hurt lied to pitted against each other and they have done terrible harm to themselves and to each other the

Bible is a unique book for lots of reasons but one of them is that unlike every other story that you've ever read for most of it there are no good guys no human heroes the Bible reminds us this morning brothers and sisters that every family every family has not only skeletons in the closet but cancer in the heart we come to church on Sunday don't we in our Sunday best and I don't mean our nice clothes perhaps but at least the clothes that don't have the stains of the week we say hello we say I'm fine we worship God together we leave with a smile but we have a dirty secret that we don't talk about don't we there's a hissing in our homes there are snake bites on our hearts and we live in fear and terror of each other finding out just how far it's gone how deeply that poison of sin has eaten away at us and our families and yet if we could sit this morning and stare at a bank of

CCTV screens imagine this whole wall full of screens each one for a household all playing fly on the wall footage from behind closed doors this week or in our family homes wherever that is we would gape in disbelief not at one or two screens but at every single one for hours we would be overwhelmed by what they would reveal which is that there is no family which is not deeply poisoned and twisted by sin there is no family even in this room that is not broken and damaged and fallen beyond recognition from what God created and blessed in the beginning God is so kind isn't he he doesn't show us all of that at once because the hope would be squeezed out of our fragile hearts quicker than a lorry going over a tube of toothpaste that's not true only in our families is it but in our church family

God's family should be the family that we've always wanted and never had but there is a deep rot in every church and I'm not just talking about under the arches if you've never been down there don't go things go in there and immediately disintegrate under a thick coating of mold but that is true not only in this building but in this family in every church family there was a spiritual rot in our relationships because the church is made up isn't it of the very same people that we just saw on our CCTV screens we are it's like the old saying isn't it if you're looking for a perfect church don't bother they wouldn't let you in it's true isn't it friends God's family back then had the same problem we have now there's just more of us so why then are we surprised when sin rears its ugly head and that ancient serpent hisses its age old lies in our church family we're right to be upset to be hurt to be grieved by sin but not to be surprised or shocked because we as individuals families as a church we still live in the utter carnage of sin and if I can just step to the side of Genesis for a minute

[16 : 22] I think it's worth saying this that since this is who we are as God's family why do we pretend that we're not we let each other believe don't we that we're doing better than we really are I've rarely met a person who's been further on in the Christian life than they've let on right everyone normally most of the time we are further back in the Christian life than we want people to know why do we play that game why do we weave that web of lies selling a vision of a life that's so blessed so blessed and yet we know at heart that this week we have done it our way and not God's way brothers and sisters we are God's family and we are free from playing games like that no more we gain nothing from pretending that we are not deeply infected with the poison of sin we're free to own up to who we really are so let's do it let's confess your sin confess your struggles your doubts we can do that because secondly

God's plan always wins there's no excusing Jacob and Rebecca they do do a terrible thing but Isaac does bless Jacob just as God said would happen it's really important that we see that just look with me at verse 28 in chapter 27 verse 28 Isaac says to Jacob may God give you heaven's due and earth's richness an abundance of grain and new wine may nations serve you and peoples bow down to you be Lord over your brothers and may the sons of your mother bow down to you may those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed now Isaac doesn't know it but contrary to what he really wanted God's plan is being fulfilled as he speaks as God's promise now Isaac confirms that the older will serve the younger more than that that the earth will give its best for Jacob the sky will be open to him heaven's due earth's richness there's something there of God's promise of land isn't there to this family but it goes deeper than that after Adam's sin

God cursed the ground so it would resist Adam's efforts to grow food now Isaac gives Jacob the blessing of having ground that cooperates with his efforts so in a small way this blessing is a reversal of the curse and Jacob inherits the promise to Abraham that those who curse him will be cursed and those who bless him will be blessed in short God will deal from now on with people in the way that they deal with his family God will relate to everyone through them now that promise is passed from Abraham down to Isaac and to Jacob unwittingly Isaac hasn't kept back any blessing from Jacob he's given him everything that was handed down to him from Abraham to magnify him make him great to multiply him later in 28 verse 3 lots of children and to make him a mediator of God's blessing to the world those who bless you

I will bless there is really nothing left for Isaac to give and he's given it all to Jacob now we rightly still have mixed feelings about that is that really fair don't our hearts break the Esau when he finds out I read this week this is the most intense cry in the whole Old Testament when Esau heard his father's words he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father bless me me too my father haven't you reserved any blessing for me it's tragic isn't it a boy who's lost it all crying to his dad who can't do anything to change it but before we feel too sorry remember Esau was only too happy for that to have been his brother and Hebrews reminds us that this is what Esau chose when he sold his inheritance for the price of a lentil soup

Esau isn't any more deserving of this blessing than Jacob Jacob just got there fast and if we feel sorry for Isaac trembling violently on his deathbed notice he's not sorry for his scheme he's only troubled that he's got the wrong son so whichever way you cut it friends neither brother deserves what Isaac was giving out and Isaac doesn't deserve to see out his days peacefully the blessing comes by God's pure grace through terrible sin to the one that he chose now no doubt we've still got loads of questions perhaps for you this raises painful personal questions about why things happen the way that they do I'm more than happy to talk about that with you after the service or during the week but the time comes doesn't it when we need to put our hands over our mouths and recognize in humble silence that this was God's plan and promise from the start through the wicked plans and the confusing lies

[22:18] God gets his plan done we know that God can't be guilty of sin his hands are clean but he is so perfectly transcendent so perfectly in control of all his creatures and all their actions that he can work his plan through any circumstances even a repeat of what happened in the garden so long ago what happens in this chapter is utter carnage there is no way of salvaging it and yet God keeps his promise and his plan wins which means brothers and sisters that there is no situation in the world in our families in our lives that is too far gone that God cannot work through you to bring about what he's promised us there might be things going on for you today or people that you know and you can't believe there's any way back our lives are so complicated aren't they

I think the longer I've lived the more I've realized that I can't untangle even my own life let alone anyone else's but there is no situation so wrong in the life of a family or a church family that God's plan cannot win through you in fact he sees to it that his plan does win through and over the utter carnage of our sin to give us what he's promised us his blessing a blessing is a word that we throw around isn't it we use it to talk about nice weather being treated by friends getting a promotion at work those are all good gifts from God but blessing in Genesis is the answer to the problem we thought about earlier in the beginning we had God's blessing and we threw it back in his face when we turned away from him and now every family on earth is fallen and twisted by sin even God's family as we sit here today and so we all live under God's curse for our sin wars fights family breakdown difficult relationships life is complicated and hard and one day we will all die but the opposite of cursing is blessing so when

God says he will bless his family he is saying he will give us back what we once threw in his face and when he says that through his family every family on earth will be blessed he is holding out to the whole world the antidote for the sin that poisons every family and person we think that there is no hope but God promises there is a way back and a way out for humanity and as if to prove it to us he's even brought it about through and in spite of the very sin that we think we can't escape we see that supremely don't we at the cross when they hurled their insults at him he did not retaliate when he suffered he made no threats he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness by his wounds you have been healed through the very worst sin ever committed the crucifixion of the

Lord Jesus God worked to bless even the people who did that to him even us even his world through the death of his son God is on an eternal mission to bless us and friends in Jesus he will succeed in blessing us and bringing us back to himself no matter how hard we try to stop him so what hope is there for us and for our world well Genesis 27 says there is a sure and certain hope because God has promised and no amount of sin no amount of sin can make him fail so friends as we go let me urge you to rest your hope in him fully when despair hangs over your hearts hope and you hope and hope in what he's done and hope in what he's done and giving up his one and only son to death so that he could give us his blessing and friends if you've never done that before if your hope is not in

Jesus he is your only hope so however deeply you're stuck in sin however hard you feel it is to come back turn to him today put your hope in him and you will go from here with his blessing forever through his son Jesus Christ let's pray together our father father there is so much not only in your word but in in the history of our world and in our lives and in the news and in our homes that so confuses us and that is so painful and that we can do nothing about father how we thank you that you are on a mission to bring us back and to bless us lord we don't deserve that at all we thank you lord that even through our sin and over our sin you are god and you promise to do amazing things through your son for us the forgiveness of our sins and a right relationship with you and a whole new world where righteousness dwells father we long for that and we hope in him and pray lord that you would help us all to hope in him all the more firmly lord this week for what we have seen in your word and we pray in

[29 : 01] Jesus name amen Lord to you do you