

99-10-10a

As we continue our worship this morning, you will recall that we currently find ourselves in the book of Genesis. We are in chapter 28. As a result of happenings within the camp of Isaac, between Jacob and Esau, between Jacob and Isaac, with the spurring on and collusion of Rebekah, Jacob has at this point departed.

Although he is not the firstborn, he has come away with the rights of the firstborn, the birthright. He has come away with the blessing that belongs to the firstborn. We will find that this is not the last time that those things which are possessions by birth of the firstborn will devolve to those who are not the firstborn.

It is the beginning of establishing a pattern, which we have already noted, where God will reverse expectations. He will operate in a way that is not what we come to expect, where the elder will serve the younger rather than being his master, where the last shall be first, where the foolish things of this earth are used to confound the wise. But at the same time, we don't want to overlook the fact that God's grace is greater than all of our sins.

It reminds me there is a hymn. You see the title as you are browsing the hymnal a lot more than you actually sing it. At least this is my experience.

But I have always been struck as I browse through the hymnal, you run across this hymn, and the title of it is, There is a wideness in God's mercy. We sometimes think that there is a plan of God for our lives, which is true. There has been some debate about how specific that plan is.

We have talked often about the summary of this whole area of thinking in Gary Friesen's book Decision Making and the Will of God. Some people think there are just boundaries that God has set, and within those boundaries it is pretty much up to you what you do, as long as you are within the bounds of morality, as long as you are within the bounds of the law of liberty, the law of love, the law of supreme sacrifice, and so forth. Some people believe there is not necessarily a specific individual that you should marry.

There is a pool of people, any one of which, if you marry them, God will bless. You could go a variety of places. You could attend a variety of schools.

You could engage in a variety of occupations. As long as they are within the boundaries that God has set, you can pretty much be confident that God can and will bless in any of those areas, and that there is not a specific person, a specific occupation, a specific geographic will of God, and so forth. I think sometimes this debate misses the point.

Operationally, you can probably subscribe to either one of those viewpoints, and if you operate properly, it really doesn't make a difference, because functionally it is going to

work out the same. We have an example here that illustrates this in Esau. Esau is a son of Isaac.

Esau initially possesses the birthright and the right to the blessing. I believe Esau is a believer. I think he will be resurrected on the day that the Old Testament saints are resurrected.

I think that his mistake was not failing to believe that there was a God, or that God would reward those who diligently seek Him. His mistake was not valuing the things of God, not assigning them importance, not making it a priority, not realizing and seizing the value of what was his by right of birth. It would be odd to me that God would use Esau as an illustration of those who have things by right of birth, and who squander them or who lose possession of them if Esau is not in fact a believer.

To sharpen the point here a little bit, what about Esau? Did he make a couple of bad choices that wrecked his whole life? If you subscribe, as I do, to what I believe is the best understanding of what the Bible teaches, that there is in fact a specific will of God, that there are specific places to be, specific people to be in relationship with, whether it's marriage or friendship or work or anything else. I don't think anything is left to the vagaries of chance, or that God in a sense just doesn't care as long as it's moral and doesn't violate any commandments. God has a specific plan for the human race, and I think it gets right down to the specifics of each individual.

On other occasions we've noted this in Scripture. But here's the question. What if you miss it? What if that's true? There really is a person that God has designed that is the perfect match for your soul as well as your body, with whom God has planned a future and offspring and impact in lots of different ways.

What if you miss it? What if God really wants you to go to a particular school or obtain a particular type of training or have a particular set of experiences so that you are prepared for something down the line, and then you miss it? One of the great difficulties that crops up, and one of the reasons people decide they don't like and are not going to subscribe to the specific will of God idea, is if you miss it your life is sort of over. It's always going to be second best and leftovers and pining for what might have been. Esau would be a classic example.

Here's Esau. He's young. He's foolish.

He loves to hunt. He comes in. He makes a mistake.

He gives away his birthright. Circumstances seem to cheat him out of his blessing. Was it Esau's fault that the deception took place and that he missed out on the blessing of the firstborn? You can think back to the prophecy before the sons were even born, and God says the elder will serve the younger, and it's like Esau never had a chance.

It's fate, sort of. It's a divine fate. It's the divine decree or the divine plan that Esau, even though he possessed these things, really never had a chance.

As we think about this and as we meditate on what the meaning of the Jacob and Esau stories are for our lives, we can all think back to decision points and we think, well, what if? What if I had chosen a different way? What if I had been smarter? What if I had been more careful? What if I had paid more attention to the great spiritual issues that were at stake when I made certain decisions? Was there a grander, higher, nobler, more blessed path for me that I can now never tread because I goofed up? I made a mistake, and now God is going to have to work really hard just to make my life livable because I missed the train, the ship pulled away. They have this, of course, in the military. One of the most severe mistakes you can make if you're in the Navy or the Marine Corps is what's known as missing movement.

Now, there are other contexts where missing movement can be a bad experience. But in the service, if the ship that you're assigned to, whether you're a Navy, you're on the crew, or they're taxiing you, I've always sort of thought of the Navy as just the taxi service for the Marines. They drive the transportation to get the Marines where they need to go and do what they need to do, and they can fire off some naval gunfire to do their little minor bit.

But there will be a scheduled time, and that ship is going to pull in the gangplank. It's going to cast off the mooring lines and sail. It's going to leave.

And if you've been out having a happy time on liberty and come back to consciousness and pull yourself together and rush down there, and you're two minutes late, you can't get on the ship. And it's one of the most severe errors you can make. It is a tremendously big black mark.

You can even be hired out of the service for missing movement. There are very few things as severe. And yet we get the idea that, well, did I miss the boat, literally, earlier on? Esau seems to be a classic example of this.

And even Jacob, as you look at some of the decisions and some of the episodes in his life, he has done some things that are very dishonorable. You can't find much admirable in the way that he obtains these things away from his brother. But in our scripture reading this morning, I want you to watch for the grace of God, specifically with regard to two individuals that we have now studied up to this point in Genesis.

One is Esau and the other is Lot. In each case, we have seen these individuals make poor decisions, decisions that reflect an indifference or an apathy to the things of God, missing opportunities to associate themselves with blessing, with the plan and the purpose of God. What is the outcome with regard to these two individuals who are classic illustrations of this principle? Turn with me for our scripture reading this morning

to Deuteronomy 2. Deuteronomy 2. In Deuteronomy, you might turn first to the beginning of the book just to set the context.

The book begins, These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on this side of the Jordan, in the wilderness, in the plain opposite Suph, between Paran, Tophel, Laban, Hazaroth and Deez Ahav. It is eleven days journey from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea. It came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spoke to the children of Israel according to all that the Lord had given him as commandments to them.

This is as far as we need to go. This is Moses addressing Israel for the last time. This is after the forty years of wandering, shortly before they will cross the Jordan under Joshua's leadership to take possession of the land.

And Moses is going to review for them their history, and then he's going to review for them the law that should guide them as they enter the land and live under the watchful eye of the Lord. So Moses begins and rehearses their history from the time that they left Egypt all the way up to the present. In chapter two, he continues this history.

He picks up at a point after they had tried to enter the land. The twelve spies had gone in, had come back and given the report. Caleb and Joshua said, let's go.

The other ten said, let's not. The whole nation wept overnight. They didn't have the faith to enter, and so they were then going to have to spend the forty years until that generation dropped in the wilderness.

In verse 42 of chapter one, they wanted to try to retake it. This is another illustration. They wanted to go into the land, but at the point of entry, they lost their nerve, they lost their faith.

You can see if you browse through chapter one of Deuteronomy, the whole idea that they were not willing to enter the land. They refused to enter the land. Well, what does this do to the future, to the nation, to the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Here's the people that God has brought out with a mighty hand, and yet at the point of entering the land, they don't have the stomach for it.

They don't have the faith. God is not real enough to them. The promises of God are not sufficiently motivating to overcome their fear.

And out of fear, they fall away, and they don't want to go in. God says, okay, you're not going to go in. You're going to wander in the wilderness, and your children will enter the land.

You can see this in verse 39 of chapter one. Your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims. See, they were all worried, well, we're going to go in and be

slaughtered, and our children are going to be slain.

God says, no. Your children, who you say will be victims, who today have no knowledge of good and evil, meaning they are not a part of your bad decision. They're not accountable.

They're not responsible for this decision that you've made not to go in. They shall go in there. To them I will give it, and they shall possess it.

But as for you, turn and take your journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea. You're going to have to kind of go back the way you came. Then you answered and said to me, we have sinned against the Lord.

We will go up and fight, just as the Lord our God commanded us. And when every one of you had girded on his weapons of war, you were ready to go up into the mountain. And the Lord said to me, tell them, do not go up, do not go fight, for I am not among you, lest you be defeated before your enemies.

They kind of try to take a second run at the decision. They say, oh, well, okay, now we're really ready to go up. And God says, no, you missed that decision point.

It was a now or never point, and you missed it. It's too late. You can't go back and redo that decision.

The Lord said, do not go up or fight, lest you be defeated before your enemies. I spoke to you, yet you would not listen, but rebelled against the command of the Lord and presumptuously went up into the mountain. And the Amorites who dwelt in that mountain came out against you and chased you as bees do and drove you back from Seir to Hormah.

Then you returned and wept before the Lord, but the Lord would not listen to your voice nor give ear to you. They tried to do it anyway, even though God said, I won't be with you if you try to go back and undo what you've done. Try to go back and take another run at the decision that, well, they did anyway, and they were defeated.

So you remained in Kadesh many days according to the days that you spent there. But chapter 2 is where we want to pick up. This is the context.

Remember now where we are. Then we turned and journeyed into the wilderness of the way of the Red Sea, as the Lord spoke to me, and we skirted Mount Seir for many days. Do you remember Seir? What does Seir mean? We just saw this a chapter ago in talking about Esau's name.

This is the land of Edom. This is Esau's place. The Lord spoke to me, saying, You have skirted this mountain long enough.

Turn northward and command the people, saying, You are about to pass through the territory of your brethren, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. And they will be afraid of you. Therefore watch yourselves carefully.

So Israel, after many generations, is coming in contact. Remember they've been in slavery and bondage in Egypt for 400 years or so. Now they're coming back in contact with their brethren.

Literally. Jacob's brother Esau. Do not meddle with them, God says.

For I will not give you any of their land. No, not so much as one footstep. Because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession.

You shall buy food from them with money that you may eat. You shall also buy water from them with money that you may drink. You're not going to presume on their hospitality.

You're not going to say, Well, we're your long-lost brethren. You owe us something. We're going to mooch some things from you.

God says you will buy food with money. You will buy water with money that you may drink. For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands.

He knows your trudging through this great wilderness. These 40 years the Lord your God has been with you. And you have lacked nothing.

And when we passed beyond our brethren, the descendants of Esau, who dwell in Seir, away from the road of the plain, away from Eilat and Ezean-Geber, we turned and passed by way of the wilderness of Moab. What's Moab named after? Where does Moab get its name? Moab, from my father. Remember, you have Lot and the daughters of Lot, and they get him drunk with wine, and they get him to lay with them, and they both become pregnant.

And each of them has a son. One of them is named Moab, from my father. The other is Ammon.

Moab and Ammon are the nations descended from Lot and the incestuous relation with his daughters. Passed by the way of the wilderness of Moab. Then the Lord said to me, Do not harass Moab, nor contend with them in battle, for I will not give you any of their land as a possession, because I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as a possession.

The Amim had dwelt there in times past, a people as great and numerous and tall as the Anakim, the giants. They were also regarded as giants like the Anakim, but the Moabites called them Amim. The Horites formerly dwelt in Seir, but the descendants of Esau dispossessed them and destroyed them from before them and dwelt in their place, just

as Israel did to the land of their possession, which the Lord gave them.

Now rise and cross over the valley of the Zered. So we crossed over the valley of the Zered, and the time we took to come from Kadesh Barnea until we crossed over the valley of Zered was thirty-eight years, until all the generation of the men of war was consumed from the midst of the camp, just as the Lord had sworn to them. For indeed the hand of the Lord was against them to destroy them from the midst of the camp until they were consumed.

So it was when all the men of war had finally perished from among the people that the Lord spoke to me, saying, This day you are to cross over at Ar, the boundary of Moab. And when you come near to the people of Ammon, do not harass them or meddle with them, for I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the descendants of Lot as a possession. That was also regarded as a land of giants.

Giants formerly dwelt there, but the Ammonites called them Zamzunim, a people as great and numerous and tall as the Anakim. But the Lord destroyed them before them, and they dispossessed them and dwelt in their place. Notice the Lord destroyed them from before them.

Just as He had done for the descendants of Esau, who dwelt in Seir, when He destroyed the Horites from before them, they dispossessed them and dwelt in their place even to this day. And the Avim, who dwelt in villages as far as Gaza, the Kaphtarim, who came from Kaphtor, destroyed them and dwelt in their place. Rise, take your journey, and cross over the river Arnon.

Look, I have given into your hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land. Begin to possess it and engage him in battle. This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you upon the nations under the whole heaven, who shall hear the report of you and shall tremble and be in anguish because of you.

And so you have Sihon the Amorite, the king of Heshbon, defeated. Later on in chapter 3 you have Og, king of Bashan, he's going to be defeated, and so forth. But the point I want to make here, and I hope I haven't confused you, because you remember that shortly, it wasn't that much time after they left Egypt that they first came up to the land and sent in the spies.

Caleb and Joshua came with the good report, the ten came with the bad. Because they were not willing to go in, that was the forty years of wandering. But notice what God says to Israel, You are not given any of the land belonging to the descendants of Esau.

I have not given you anything belonging to the descendants of Lot. God gave the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, their own land. He destroyed from before them the

previous inhabitants of the land, just as He's going to do for Israel.

When you think about it, even though they are not the people of the presence, they are not the people of the name, where God will dwell, and where God will glorify Himself, God nevertheless honors the promises to Abraham in the descendants of Lot and in the descendants of Esau. He makes a space for them. He drives out the giants, who are just as big and just as tall and just as deadly as the Anakim that the Israelites are going to drive out of the land of Canaan.

God destroys the giants from before the Edomites. God destroys the giants from before the Moabites and the Ammonites. Makes a nation of them.

You can't have a nation without a land. And God told Abraham, I will make you the father of many nations. And even Esau and even Lot, their descendants are blessed in this way.

And they are given their own land and God says, I'm not taking it away from them. I've given it to them. I've driven out the giants from before them and it's their possession.

It's the grace of God to Esau. It's the grace of God to Lot. Even though in the Genesis account, they are an illustration of what happens when you're apathetic.

What happens when you are indifferent. What happens when you do not make God and the promises of God, the object of faith. God does not forget His promise.

God is faithful. God will bless because they still are associated with Abraham. They are still men who believe in God.

And God does not leave them destitute. God blesses them and blesses their descendants and takes care of them. Gives them a place.

Makes them a nation. Drives out their enemies from before them. And does not let other people of God come in and dispossess them and take what belongs to them.

Do they deserve this? Have they earned it? Is it a reward for faith? It is nothing more than the mercy and the grace of God. It is blessing by association with Abraham. Generations after the death of Abraham, God is still blessing by association.

Because Lot is Abraham's nephew. God preserved Lot. God rescued Lot through Abraham.

God preserved him out of the destruction of Sodom. And his descendants are still given a land and given a nationhood. And God does not even have the Israelites go in and take their land away from them.

So this is one level of God's mercy. Where even if there is not a return, even if there is not a spark of faith or an eventual recovery of interest and orientation toward the things

of God, the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. And God promised them nationhood.

And that involves having land. And God honors that even hundreds of years later. What we are going to see in the life of Jacob is that not only is there a plan and a purpose of God that will be fulfilled, but if there is a change of mind, even after mistakes, even after bad decisions, God will turn cursing to blessing.

God will work things together for good, for those who love him, for those who are the called according to his purpose. When we think about this idea that there is sort of a gilded path for life if we make the right decisions, if we go to the right places, if we marry the right person, if we identify and pursue the geographic will of God and the will of God when it comes to where we place ourselves socially and so forth professionally, if we miss that, what is going to happen to us? It is like a lot of other things in life. We have learned, I think, over the course of our studies in the past several years that the measure of our fruitfulness, the measure of our life, is not the outcome in circumstances.

It is the fruit of the Spirit that is born, whatever our circumstances may be. Well, a corollary to that understanding is the circumstances are really not primary. It doesn't really matter what the circumstances are.

What matters is how do we function within those circumstances. Can there be more than one set of circumstances in which God can bless, in which God can accomplish His purpose? Have we somehow forever missed God's plan and God's purpose and the blessing that God has for us? Esau and Lot are an example of the fact that God will accomplish His purpose and fulfill His promise even if there is no positive orientation, positive volition, if you will, involved in that believer. They will still serve the purpose.

They will still be incorporated into God's plan just as God has said. The thing that matters for us, because we hope and pray and pursue the opportunity to do more than that, to not just be carried on a stretcher into the forward progress of God's plan, but to respond to the call, to be those who love God, there is something great and wonderful beyond that. And this is what we're going to see in Jacob's life.

Think about Jacob. What would have been the ideal in Jacob's operation? Would he have manipulated his brother out of the birthright in a weak moment? That's not an ethical, it's not the high road to take. It's a sleazy thing to do.

It's a chiseling way of obtaining something. Would he have deceived his father and wrapped the fresh goat skins around himself and said he was someone he was not and obtained these things by deception? God had said before he was ever born that he would rule his brother, that he would be the possessor of these things. He didn't need to do these things to get them, but that's what he did.

He took the low road. He sinned in many ways in obtaining these. Well, by engaging in deceit and manipulation and so forth, has he knocked himself out? Think about the ideal.

Jacob would have grown up and been a young man of great faith and vision and would have relied on God, would have patiently waited. Something would have happened outside the manipulating actions that Jacob engages in to bring these things about. Jacob perhaps would not have had to leave the land.

He would have dwelt in the tents of his father Isaac at a certain point one way or another. Esau would have been out of the picture. Jacob would have inherited all these things as blessings from God and life would have gone forward.

He would still be the father of the tribes of Israel. They might have come about in a different way. Maybe he would have had one wife instead of four to have his twelve sons.

But he doesn't do that. The outcome is the same, but the means by which it comes about incorporates his mistakes. He is going to leave the land penniless, so to speak.

He is without any possessions. He doesn't bring the ten camels when he goes to look for a wife the way the servant of Abraham did. Obviously, because of his failures and because of his sins, there are things that he needs to learn.

If he had been a glowing, shining example of faith, he wouldn't have needed to learn some things. He is going to wind up learning outside the land working for his uncle up in Haran. The outcome is going to be the same, but the path to it is going to be different.

The path involves his mistakes, his lack of faith, his failings and his sins. But through those, God is going to put him in places to learn what he doesn't know, to profit even from his bad choices. God will work these bad things together for good.

The end result is going to be the same. Jacob is going to become Israel, and Israel is going to be the people of God. It could have happened in a wonderful, shining way where he was like Enoch and walked with God and everything was grand and glorious, but it doesn't happen that way.

He fails and errs and falls short again and again. God will use these things and bring him back to the same outcome. He will be the man of faith that he is supposed to be, but the path is different.

And the wonderful thing about this, when you meditate on the path of Jacob, is we have made mistakes. We have messed up choices. There are certain things that God will have happen no matter what.

And he will stop us. He will put the angel in the path of the donkey, like he does for Balaam, for certain things that he absolutely does not permit us to fall into. He will save

us in spite of ourselves from certain things.

There are other things, and this has been called the permissive will of God. God will permit us to fail. God didn't come in and intervene when Jacob beat his brother out of the birthright.

God did not intervene. God didn't have Esau return early and prevent the giving of the blessing by way of deceit. God will permit certain things, and there is, depending on how you want to look at it, an alternate path that leads to the same objective.

A lot of times when you are trying to go somewhere, there are a couple of different ways. My brother was up in the Tulsa area and deciding on how best to get back to New Orleans. Well, my dad suggested one way.

Go over through Arkansas. Go through certain towns and take certain roads. You look at them on the map, and they are little bitty roads.

They go through a lot of small towns, and you think, boy, I could see this taking forever to go through here. There is another way, coming down through Dallas, that is all on interstates. Looking at it on the map, it is hard to see which one is better, which one would get you there the fastest with the least amount of trouble.

Either way you go, you will wind up traveling from Tulsa to New Orleans. One way is going to take you through the hills and little towns and places in Arkansas. The other is going to keep you on the nice, fast, 16-lane roads that are all marked as interstates.

Well, if you go through Arkansas, you are going to learn something about the roads in Arkansas. They twist and they turn. They go up and down.

You get the little stoplights where there is nothing but a food mart and a gas station. Either way, you are going to wind up at the same destination. God does this for us in our lives, especially in the case of believers.

Although they make mistakes and fail, if you have the desire to please God, if you have the desire to bear fruit and to be pleasing in His sight, do not be discouraged by failures to the point that you think, well, I am off the road. I am never going to get to the destination now. God will bring us to the destination if we want to get there and if we are trusting Him.

We may take a different street route. It may take us longer. We may have to learn things along the way so that when we get there, we will be the people that we would have been if we started out as wonderful examples of great faith and judgment and wisdom and so forth.

We could take the highway and get right there. We wouldn't have to learn some things

that we already know. If we don't know those things, we need to learn them so that we have them as possessions when we get there.

Why did God stop the people of Israel at the Jordan? When the spies came back and gave the report and they cried and wept all night and said, we can't go in. And God said, okay, you are not going in. You are going to wander.

And they said, oh, wait a minute. Wait a minute. Change my mind.

We are picking up our weapons. We are ready to go. And God says, no.

Why does that whole interchange take place? What's different about them wanting to go in a day later? They had already reflected by their trepidation and their fear and their weeping that there was something missing in their souls. They are not qualified to go in the land. They are not ready.

They wouldn't be able to function in a God-glorifying way if He did take them into the land. Could God not have just parted the Jordan and sent them on in and wiped out the enemies from before them? They need to be a certain kind of people to dwell in the land. They have demonstrated that they are not those people.

So God, in a national sense, is going to put them through 40 years of experience. Those children who grow up and spend that 40 years being sustained by the grace of God, gathering the manna, winning the battles, drinking the water that comes from nowhere, are going to be a different quality, a different kind of people. And when they come back to the Jordan 40 years later, they're going to cross and they're going to win victory after victory.

Not without mistakes. They still have AI. They still have the Gibeonites.

They still have their problems and things to learn. But because they have gone through that 40-year detour, the nation is a different kind of nation that goes in. When we fail and make a mistake, if we look and see where we missed an opportunity, we made a wrong choice, and our life now takes a different path, it doesn't mean that it's any less blessed or that it's any less useful in God's plan.

It just means we had some things to learn. And our choice has led us in a path where God is going to teach us those things if we're willing, if we're people of faith, if we have confidence that God will still bring us to the destination, that we cannot foul up so badly that God can't accomplish His purpose. It boils down to this.

Which is greater? Our ability to fail or God's ability to bless? If our ability to fail is so great that it can overcome God's ability to bless, then we are of all men most miserable because it is possible for us to make bad choices and God is just going to throw up His hands and say, well, I didn't really think you were going to do that. I can't repair that. It's

not possible.

God's grace is greater than all of our sin. God's omnipotence is greater. It's not like you can surprise the Lord and come up with a type of failure that He just couldn't foresee.

The only thing God can't work with is apathy, no faith, total indifference. God can still accomplish His purpose like He does for the Edomites and like He does for the Moabites and the Ammonites. His promises to them are still fulfilled.

They have an existence. They have a land. And this is illustrative of what we've talked about in regard to the kingdom.

Remember what Jesus says to the Pharisees? He says, You will see many coming from the east and west and north and south and sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom. But you yourselves will be cast out. You're going to be on the outside.

Esau is a believer. Lot is a believer. They're going to be resurrected.

But they're not going to dwell in the land of promise. They will have a land. They will have a future.

They will have an existence. They're going to be blessed and protected by God just like He does these Edomites and Ammonites and Moabites. But they're not in the land of promise.

They're not in the place of God's presence. And this is the choice that we have before us. If we choose the path of faith, there is no failure that we commit that will prevent God from accomplishing His purpose.

We may have to take a long and rocky path in order to learn the things that we need to learn. I've always thought, even from the time I was a young boy, and observed that there's two different ways you can learn things. You can look at the experience of others and say, Well, I see that that's not a good thing.

I'm not going to do that. And you invent new and creative ways to fail yourself that you've never seen anybody else do. But to fail to learn from history, to fail to learn from example, means that you're going to have to live these things out yourself.

And sometimes we just have to learn the hard way. We have to learn through our own experience. It isn't sufficient that we've seen someone else make a mistake, whether it's in the Bible or in our periphery.

We just don't seem to catch the truth. And so we're going to have to live through experiences. And God is going to have to teach it to us at first hand, so to speak.

It's a harder and more painful way to learn, but we still come out, on the other side,

qualified. So if we can learn the easy way, if we can study the Word of God and make it the object of our faith and say, I know that's true. I'm not going to have to learn that by experience.

I trust that. I believe that. And I'm going to operate in that light.

We can take the interstate and get to New Orleans. If that's something that we just can't catch the easy way, we need to learn it. And so our alternate path, the path that's a result of our bad decisions and our failures, that's going to be the path where we learn those things.

And God is still with us, just like Jacob. He has seized these things in a bad way. But when God appears to him at Bethel, He doesn't say, Jacob, I want to talk to you about this deceitfulness business.

I want to talk to you about this rap and the goatskin. Where were you when I was given the promises? Didn't you hear what your mother said? I told you already that the elder will serve the younger. What were you thinking? God appears to Jacob and what does He say? He doesn't bring up his failure at all.

He says, you're leaving this land. You're about to go away and you're going to be gone for a long time. But my promises are sure and I'm going to be with you wherever you go.

Did God abandon Israel during the 40 years of wandering? He did not. He was with them every step of the way. Their sandals never wore out.

They never lacked for manna. They never got to the point of starvation or dying of thirst. They didn't get wiped out by military enemies.

They made a bad mistake. They disappointed God, if you will, in not being qualified to cross over the Jordan. But God stayed with them and God taught them the things that they needed to know over that next 40 years.

And when they come back to the Jordan, they are the people that God wanted. They're the people that God can give the land. God does that for them.

So when you think about Esau and you think about Lot and you think about Jacob, it's a wonderful illustration of the path that our lives may take. There are areas of our life where we're like Abraham and we're people of faith. When God says, Get up and go, we get up and go.

And he can take us straight to the land and we possess it and we dwell in it. There are other areas of our life, there are other places where we've made a path of decision and we think, Well, there's no hope there. I fouled that up.

No, we haven't. As long as we keep coming back to God and throwing ourselves on His

mercy and trusting Him, we may take a different path, but we're still going to get to the destination. And God will be with us along that path every step of the way.

He will teach us what we need to know. He will mend our hearts. He will purge us.

He will make us clean. He will make us the people who are qualified and who know what to do once they walk across the Jordan into the land, the place of fruitfulness, the place of victory, the place of possession, the place where God will put His name, the place where God will dwell. I know we've spent a lot of time relating our Scripture reading this morning to the story, but really, that's the big picture.

If there's nothing else we get from this section of Genesis that deals with the patriarchs, this is something to dwell on. This is something to meditate on. We can all look back and see places where we could have chosen a better path, but it's not the path we take, it's the destination we arrive at that counts.

It's not circumstances, it is what goes on in our heart. And if we are people of faith, if we claim God's mercy, if we trust God for His promises, He will be with us every step of the way, even when we fail, even when we foul up, and we will arrive at that place that God has promised for us, the rest that remains for the people of God that's talked about in Hebrews. We're going to pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we'll resume with the details of the narrative in Genesis 28. We'll be right back.