

Grace that Chooses

Grace from the Patriarchs

By Steve Viars

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Genesis 25:19-34

Preached On: Sunday, June 28, 2015

Faith Church

5526 State Road 26 E

Lafayette, IN 47905

Website: <http://www.faithlafayette.org/church>

Online Sermons: <http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette>

If you're a fan of professional sports, you probably pay some level of attention to the annual draft where the teams get together and because of their previous win-loss record or some other factor, they systematically choose who they would like to sign to play for them the following year. Well, some would argue that a team's ability to draft the best players for their organization is one of the most important determinants of the following season's success or failure which is why an incredible amount of time and attention is given to analyzing each player and comparing them to one another so they consider every imaginable stat, sometimes even going back to high school or junior high. If it can be measured, if it can be tested, it will be and then it's plugged into a computer spreadsheet tracking all the data. We want the best players. Then there is the issue of having a strategy for draft day itself because you have to think through all the various scenarios of who the other teams might choose before you, how that's going to impact your choices. There is the possibility of making some trades behind the scenes, even during the draft. I was reading an article this week that talked about how one team even plans out the actual music that's going to be played in their so-called war room to help them make the best choices and on and on.

It's an amazing spectacle. We saw it this week with the NBA. It's true of other sports as well but the underlying premise is this: the team that identifies and drafts the best players is the one that is most likely to win once the season begins. Now, that's not just limited to sports. You've probably, if you're in the business world, have read this book "Good to Great," by Jim Collins and he's the one who argued for the importance of getting the right people on the bus, right? We've all heard that now a zillion times, getting the right people on the bus.

Now, this morning I'm not questioning whether that's the right mentality in sports; it probably is. Or the right mentality in business; many times that's true as well. But I want to ask you is this: is that the way it works in the family of God? That the Lord only selects and uses the best talent? Is that it? That the fulfillment of his promises is dependent on people like you and me having a superior time in the 40 yard dash or whatever it might be? And I think that question matters. I think it matters for several reasons. A person could be here today and conclude, "Because I have so many dropped passes in the past, I have so many failures that God can't or God won't use me today. He's

taken me off the draft board because of my past." Really? Really? Or somebody else could say, "You know, I'm not as skilled as that person." Or, "I'm not as gifted as that one so I'd better just sit here passively on the bench and watch the game because surely there are better, more talented people that could go out on the field in my place." Is that the way it works in the economy of God? Or others might look at the way the game is going today and conclude God's ability to fulfill his promises is obviously in jeopardy because he doesn't have enough superstars. That's what we need. That's what we need. Or his overall game plan isn't always immediately apparent. What's going on? I would suggest to you that all of that would fail to take into account the nature of God's grace and specifically in this case this morning, his grace that chooses.

With that in mind, please open your Bible to Genesis 25. That's on page 18 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you so if you need that this morning, just pull that one out. We teach the word of God here Sunday after Sunday after Sunday so you want to have a Bible on your lap or, I'll capitulate, a Bible on your phone but get that baby out to Genesis 25. It's page 18 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you're going to use that one.

Our church's theme all year long is "Finding Grace" taken from a number of just marvelous passages in the word of God but including this one, our theme verse I suppose for this year, Hebrews 4:16, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace." We need to do that every day, do you know that? We need to do that every week. We need to do that this week, no question about that. "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne," interesting, authority, "of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." It's not an overstatement to say that the concept of grace is one of the central doctrines in all the word of God and therefore it's one of the core values of our church family. Do you realize that many of the decisions that we make, whether we're talking individually or as a church, are evaluated and determined through the lens of grace and this year especially we want to do what this passage of Scripture is inviting us, frankly is admonishing us, to do: to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.

Now, this summer, we're doing a study from the book of Genesis on "Grace from the Patriarchs," that's Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph. Now, I realize we will have people here this morning who are brand new to studying the word of God and that's true Sunday after Sunday after Sunday and you might say, "Oh, here we go. A bunch of people I don't even know. Abraham, seriously? Isaac, Jacob and Joseph? Oh my." Well listen, we plan for you to be here. In the back of our minds everything that we're doing is trying to serve every person who comes including those who are brand new because we recognize God is working constantly in the lives...for example, you might be here because your children came to vacation Bible school here this week and they had a great time. By the way, aren't you glad they did? It would be a whole lot better than your kids having a great time bellying up to the bar, so aren't you glad? There you go. I'm way off my notes on that one. So I hope you're glad. We're glad too so maybe they said to you yesterday, "Hey, mom, dad, I'd like to go to church tomorrow." I don't know what you

thought of that but maybe you're here somewhat by duress but at least you're here and if you are, we're glad. We're glad.

You might be here for the community picnic. You said, "I hear they're having some food over at the church house today," and for whatever reason you came a little early. Well, I'm glad you're here for the community picnic and I'm glad you're here to listen to the word of God.

You might have just moved to town. That happens a lot in the summertime. Or maybe God's just working in your life and you're not used to studying the word of God but you're here. Here's what I want to tell you right out of the blocks: even if some of these names or some of these places sound unfamiliar to you, the major points that we're going to try to make are going to be very clear and very understandable to all of us. That's a promise. And remember this too: I think God wants to meet us here. Do you really believe that? That the most important person in this room is unseen? And do you believe that he cares about you a lot? A lot and he wants you to understand his words so if you do your part, I promise you that he'll do his.

Now, let's thread this story up just a little bit in Genesis 25. Last week we studied the incredible story of Abraham being asked to take his only son, Isaac, the son who had been previously promised to both Abraham and his wife Sarah and do what? And sacrifice him at a place which God would subsequently reveal. It was an incredible test of Abraham's faith which, by God's grace, he passed with flying colors. And at the very last moment, God stayed Abraham's hand and he provided a ram in his son Isaac's place. Of course, it was a beautiful picture of the coming Messiah, the perfect Lamb of God, who would die on the cross for mankind's sin and make a way possible for us to be redeemed by his grace.

Well, now this morning, we're fast-forwarding to Genesis 25. It wasn't our intent to do a verse-by-verse study of this book; we're just selecting certain stories that especially emphasize God's grace so we're skipping a couple of chapters. By this time, Isaac, the one who had been on that altar to be sacrificed as a young boy, he's 60 years old now if we have the chronology right. In the intervening chapters that we're skipping, God has given him a wife named Rebekah. That's a marvelous story in and of itself but just like her mother-in-law Sarah, Rebekah, whom Isaac married when he was 40 years old, can't have children. What are the odds of that happening? And for those who have been part of this study, what's the threefold provision of the Abrahamic covenant initiated in Genesis 12? You know, don't you? Land and seed and blessing. Well, couldn't God just draft men and women who could easily and instantly conceive children? Did the Packers draft all the fertile people in the first round? I wasn't sure if I should say that or not but I thought it was funny. Sometimes I'm the only one, I realize. Or listen, listen: maybe does God have reasons to use people different than the ones our world might expect or have chosen to fulfill his promises in ways that are dripping in grace? Maybe there's a reason for all of this barrenness.

Now, we're going to look at Genesis 25, beginning in verse 19. You might want to title these verses "Be careful what you wish for." Genesis 25:19, "Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham became the father of Isaac; and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean," that's an amazingly long description, "to be his wife. Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. But," isn't there always a but? "But the children struggled together within her." Are you picturing that? I want to be pregnant. Oh, I'm not sure I like being pregnant. "The children struggled together within her and she said, 'If it is so, why then am I this way?' So she went to inquire of the LORD. The LORD said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger.'" Forget the NBA draft here. "When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau. Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel." I wonder if these boys are going to be fighting one another? "So his name was called Jacob; and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them. When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents. Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game," seriously? You're going to show favoritism to your one son because of what he can hunt you? "Because he had a taste for game but Rebekah loved Jacob." Oh great. "When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; and Esau said to his brother Jacob, 'Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished.' Therefore his name was called Edom. But Jacob said, 'First sell me your birthright.'" Well, thanks a lot, brother. "'First sell me your birthright.' Esau said, 'Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?' And Jacob said, 'First swear to me,'" first swear to me, "so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus," hear this, "thus Esau despised his birthright."

We're talking this morning about grace that chooses and with the time we have remaining let's think about three characteristics of people that God often uses in the fulfillment of...this is a whole lot different than the NBA draft, that's the point I'm making. It's not like God picked and used the wonderful people. Three characteristics of people that God often uses in the fulfillment of his gracious promises.

One is those who know heartache and struggle. You see, we're seeing that theme throughout our study of the patriarchs, aren't we? And my concern at this point is those who might have concluded, "Well, God can't use me because I'm damaged goods. I've had all sorts of hardships. I have a lot of hardships still going on." Well friend, it would appear to me that those are precisely the kinds of persons God does use. Do you realize that might get you to the top of the draft board, not the bottom? The Bible is very clear about Rebekah's barrenness. "Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife." Bible scholars tell us it's very unusual to have that much detail about the in-laws in a family history like this but perhaps that's intended to remind us of everything

that Abraham went through to find a wife for Isaac and the miraculous way God clearly identified Rebekah as the one he wanted to be in the line of promise, the recipients of the land and the seed and the blessing yet here it is again just like with Abraham's wife, Sarah, was barren.

Now, that's hard in any culture including ours. I'm sure even me mentioning that part of the story will be difficult for some who are going to hear this message today but it was especially difficult in this culture and even more so because the impact it seemed to have on the completion of the Abrahamic covenant. Friends, this is the kind of person that God chooses, someone who knows heartache. Someone who knows barrenness. Then you read the marvelous news that Rebekah is expecting. Verse 21, this is a very fast moving story. The Lord answered and Rebekah conceived but things aren't going well, huh? In the very next verse, "the children struggled together within her." I realize you might be tempted to say, "Well, that's just a first time mom. She didn't understand what it was like to have a baby kicking." And I realize I'm on shaky ground right now commenting on this aspect of the story as a male, "Ladies, let me explain to you how this works." But here's the exegetical point: the verb "struggled" literally means "smashed." It does, it literally means "crushed." You could accurately translate this verse, "the children smashed themselves inside of her," and understand, there's no reason to believe that she realized at that point that she had twins. It's not like that's showed up on the ultrasound and the point is she went from being barren to having a budding war brewing inside her womb which became part of her story, the twins' rivalry.

You see, what's worse, not having children or having twins who will literally be at generational war with one another? You might as well just warm up your, "Esau, stop that! Jacob, stop that!" voice because you're going to be using that every day for the rest of your natural life. And what I'm saying is: if you've ever been tempted to think that God only uses people whose children all turn out just perfectly, look at this hot mess of a family. Regardless of how bad you think your kids are, it's highly likely they've not sired warring countries.

But did you notice that both Isaac and Rebekah's response to all of this? Genesis 25:21, "Isaac prayed to Jehovah on behalf of his wife." The very next word, the very next verse, "the children struggled together within her," what? "So she went to inquire of the LORD." At least they both turned to the Lord as they faced these trials. And remember: father Abraham is still alive, the grandfather of these twins and they've undoubtedly listened to his stories of God's faithfulness many, many times. So the Lord begins to explain what's occurring here, "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger." You see, in the midst of the extended barrenness and now the intra-womb warring, God was in the process of keeping his promises and fulfilling his plan and I believe the point to them and to us is: heartache and struggle is often what qualifies you to be part of God's team. In fact, as I think back over my 28 years here, by far the average person who has been significantly used of God in service at Faith has been someone who has also had heartache and hardship in his or her life.

Sometimes that's what the Lord used to draw that person to himself to begin with. We have a community based counseling ministry here, why? Well, we believe that in the midst of pain and hurt and disappointment and failure, many times that's when a person is more open to hearing about the claims of Christ. How many baptismal stories have started, you've heard a bunch of them this year and we're thanking the Lord for the number of people who have placed their faith and trust in Christ and a number this year have identified themselves with believer's baptism. Well, think about those stories you've heard, how many started with a tragedy; how many started with a crisis. Many times that's the kind of person that God chooses. That's often the kind of person that God then uses and I would just say to you if you're here this morning and you're on the front end of that, perhaps today is the day God wants to bring you to the end of your own strength. That's why he allowed the hardship, to bring you to the end of your own wisdom or your own resources, your own righteousness so you're finally at a point where you'll admit your need and you'll place your faith and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. And I realize you might say, "Well, I certainly have the crisis, I just don't have the Savior." You admit the first and God will provide the second right here, right now. He's in the business of doing that.

It's also often in the crucible of trial that your relationship with Christ can be strengthened so you are drawn closer to him and you're in a better position to be used. Is that right? That's why James said, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." Think about that for a minute. The Bible is counterintuitive in many places. "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials," why? "Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance," if you let it. If you let it. "And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." What I'm asking is: is it possible that you're here this morning having believed that certain events make it less likely that you could be useful in the fulfillment of God's promise when the polar opposite is actually the case?

Now, let's push it another step: God also uses those who acknowledge their own imperfections. It's very important for us to consider the lesson to the original audience. We always when we're interpreting the Bible think not first, "What does that mean to me?" but "What would that have meant to the people to whom it was originally written?" We can't be absolutely dogmatic about this but most conservative students of Scripture believe that these stories were eventually codified by Moses after the exodus from Egypt. Well, how would these stories have been intended to impact them, especially because they're not whitewashed? You realize that in many ancient documents, the stories are rewritten in a way that make the leaders look really, really good. Not here, huh? Not here. Now, I think their conclusion would have been this, "Our ancestors were terribly imperfect and God kept his promises to them and he used them in the fulfillment of his plan anyway." Anyway.

Have we come across any perfect people in this book? Sarah laughs out loud at the promises of God. Abraham tells Sarah repeatedly to present herself as someone other

than his own wife. Isaac lets his love for food cause him to favor his son the hunter. Jacob bribes his famished brother with red stew. Esau despises his birthright and sells it for a bowl of that red stuff. Rebekah eventually tricks her husband, applies animal pelts to her fair-skinned favorite son. I mean, the Kardashians don't have much on these people and I honestly have no idea what that means so if that makes no sense, you say, "He's so far out of it," other than what's screaming at me from the tabloids at the grocery checkout line. It's like, "I don't care. I don't care. I don't care." I mean, it's like, why?

But the upshot is the only reason God kept his promises to them and used them in the fulfillment of his promises to the nations was his great grace and I hope we've had many opportunities to pause this year and reflect on how at its core God's grace is a humbling doctrine. Do we recognize that? Why so? Well, because it exposes our need. I imagine if you ask the average person up and down the streets of our town, "Are you glad that God is a God of grace?" we'd hear a chorus of yeses, right? I mean, who doesn't want a God to be a God of grace? But if you pushed that discussion to its logical extension and asked, "But what does your need of grace say about you?" the answer wouldn't be as positive because here's what it says, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." You understand theologically it's not like God put a layer of grace on your already wonderful story. Let that sink in for just a minute. You say, "Did he insult me?" Kind of. If it was all that wonderful, it wouldn't have needed grace.

It exposes our inability which is why we would read a seminal text like Ephesians 2:8-9 where Paul said, "For by grace you have been saved through faith," I hope you have trusted him as Savior and Lord, "and that not of yourselves," there it is, "it is the gift of God; not as a result of works," why? Think about the events of this past week. Think about how we position ourselves in our culture, "So that no one may boast." You could say it this way: grace puts us in our place. Is that right? It is right. You're not going to get a hot dog at the community picnic unless you say, "Oh yeah, that's right." Yeah, "Amen brother. Amen." Yeah, grace puts us in our place. We stand in a long line of imperfect people like Abraham and like Sarah and like Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob and Esau. Imperfect people desperately in need of grace and that means a lot of things including God will use whomever he chooses to use.

This event, this story of Esau, is mentioned most prominently in two places in the New Testament: Romans 9 and Hebrews 12. In fact, I would dare you, I would double dog dare you, to read those two chapters this week in your personal Bible study time. They are challenging chapters in the word, no question about that. Romans 9 and Hebrews 12. Paul's point in Romans 9 is: just because the world thinks that the firstborn is the one who is always worthy of a double inheritance and special provision, that's the one who will always be chosen first and honored most. Don't hold the God of heaven to that standard. You see, you might be here this morning and have said in your heart, "You know, I'm not sure I would fit in around here because I have a closet full of skeletons, a life full of imperfections." Well look, we're not going to laugh at, we're not going to minimize sin but on the other hand, we would be the first to acknowledge that we're far from sinless, right? We might as well post a sign out front, "No perfect people allowed in here." By the way, I'm fairly certain that had we posted that sign at any of our entrances this morning,

it's not like someone would have had to turn and walk away. And the reason that we're different than the NBA draft is because we're dependent wholly on the sufficient grace of our God which is why pride and superiority have no place in our family. Pride and superiority have no place among the people of God. You see, the more we understand that God fulfills his promises in and through us because of his grace not our perfection, the more we're going to carry ourselves in a spirit of humility worthy of the name of Christ.

Think about the implications of that to what has been occurring in South Carolina. One of the sad facts that we have to face is that it has been woven into the fabric of this country that people of color were less human or morally inferior to white people. Tell that to Charleston, South Carolina. I would suggest that juxtaposition of pictures is very instructive if we'll let it be. Which race was morally inferior in that particular story? But it's worse than that. American Christianity has made the same statements. Do you understand that? That's part of the American Christian heritage that white people are morally superior to people of color and in some cases, twisting the Scripture to add to the force of their arguments.

I appreciate Al Mohler. Al Mohler is the President of Southern Seminary in Louisville. Southern Seminary is the flagship seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention, although they have several that are huge, the largest seminaries on the planet. We're not a Southern Baptist church but much of what they would say and believe we would affirm, especially somebody like Al Mohler. Mohler wrote a blog this week, "The Heresy of Racial Superiority," and he was talking about his own denomination. He was talking about some of the former Presidents of his seminary and, remember, the Southern Baptist Convention is the largest Protestant denomination in our country. I'm not going to take the time, I would encourage you to read the entire blog. I'm not going to take the time to read all of it but let me read enough of it to help us understand and think about grace and the heinous sin of moral superiority. He said this, he said,

"The ideology of racial superiority is one of the saddest and most sordid evidences of the Fall and its horrifying effects. Throughout history, racial ideologies have been driving forces of war, of social cohesion, of demagoguery, and of dictatorships. Race theory was central to the Nazi regime and was used by both sides in the Pacific theater of World War II. In that theater of the war, both the Japanese and the Americans claimed that the other was an inferior race that must be defeated by force. The Japanese claimed racial superiority as central to their subjugation of other Asian peoples.

"At the same time, many white Americans claimed and assumed the superiority of caucasian skin to black and brown skin — or any other color of skin. The main 'color line,' as Frederick Douglass called it in 1881, has always been black and white in America. While this is a national problem, and theories of racial superiority have been popular in both the North and the South, it was the states of the old Confederacy that gave those

ideologies their most fertile soil. White superiority was claimed as a belief by both Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, but it was the Confederacy that made racial superiority a central purpose."

Now, and if I haven't upset you yet, sit back. Next paragraph,

"More humbling still is the fact that many churches, churchmen, and theologians gave sanction to that ideology of racial superiority. While this was true throughout the southern churches, Southern Baptists bear a particular responsibility and burden of history. The Southern Baptist Convention [he's representing it, he's talking about himself,] was not only founded by slaveholders; it was founded by men who held to an ideology of racial superiority and who bathed that ideology in scandalous theological argument. At times, white superiority was defended by a putrid exegesis of the Bible that claimed a 'curse of Ham' as the explanation of dark skin — an argument that reflects such ignorance of Scripture and such shameful exegesis that it could only be believed by those who were looking for an argument to satisfy their prejudices.

"We bear the burden of that history to this day. Racial superiority is a sin as old as Genesis and as contemporary as the killings in Emanuel AME Church in Charleston. The ideology of racial superiority is not only sinful, it is deadly."

I'm not suggesting that's the only part of the story. We also have a long history of sending and supporting missionaries around the world because of our love for the nations. You know we're doing all sorts of things to try and serve brothers and sisters around the world but if we're looking for the sin of pride and superiority, we don't have to look that far and that attitude is an offense to grace.

Now, think about if I haven't gotten you wound up yet, think about the implication of this to the Supreme Court's ruling this week on gay marriage. I've spent a limited amount of time explaining our concern that this decision could limit the legitimate religious freedoms of Christian colleges and schools and other Christian social service agencies and I don't want to rehash that. I was quoted in our paper yesterday about that issue and I stand by those statements but the bigger picture is this: what attitude will we portray in our community and in our world regarding those who choose a sexual ethic other than the one we understand the Scripture to teach and the one that we seek to follow ourselves? And how can this passage about God's gracious and effectual promises help us? And I realize somebody might say, "Well, we're going to hate the sin and we're going to love the sinner. That's what we're going to do." I suppose that starts us on the right trail but do you understand that statement is not found in the Scripture? As far as I can tell, it's a rough quote of something that Saint Augustine said and others who followed him and, yes, we ought to hate the sin but does that statement possibly fall short in certain ways? Hate the sin, love the sinner? First of all, are we supposed to think about the people who live around us as sinners or as neighbors? And by calling them "sinners," that's what any

of us have been tempted to do, does that give the impression that we think we're not? And when it comes to the matter of hating the sin, don't we have enough left in our own hearts and lives to keep us occupied every day? How about we work on our own sin within the family of God and then when we get that all straightened out we'll start focusing on someone else's? And maybe our world would be more attracted to our Savior if we focused more on reveling in his grace which is our only hope.

One of the commentators I was reading on this text quoted "The Merchant of Venice" where Portia said, "Thou justice be thy plea, consider this that in the course of justice, none of us should see salvation." And if you would say, "Well, if I were on that Supreme Court, this is what justice would be," is that the best thing we've got to talk about? "We want justice." I could tell you right now, we need something far more than justice. We desperately need grace, not for them but for us. "Thou justice be thy plea, consider this, that in the course of justice none of us should see salvation."

So who does God use in the fulfillment of his promises? Those who know heartache and struggle. Do you qualify? Those who acknowledge our own imperfections. Do you qualify? And lastly, those who value their place in God's plan. There is plenty of treachery to go around in this passage but without a doubt, what the text emphasizes is what we read at the end, "Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his," place in the promises of God, he despised his place in the plan of God, "he despised his birthright." A power word "despised." Used in two central places: 1 Samuel 17:42, "When the Philistine looked and saw David, he," what? He despised him. You see, some people do that to their place in the plan of God, they despise it. Here's another one, guys, be thankful you're not married to this hot mess, I'm sorry that was off my notes. 2 Samuel 6:16, "Then it happened as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David that Michal," his wife, "the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she," what? Can you feel it? Can you taste the disdain? "She despised him in her heart."

Think about the way Goliath viewed David. Think about the way Michal viewed David. That was what was happening in Esau. That's what he thought about his place in the fulfillment of God's promises. So he's not like the person who thinks the sadness in his past might disqualify him from being used or his failures and inadequacies might disqualify him from the team. Here's a person who knows how God uses people to fulfill his plan and frankly doesn't care. He doesn't care. "I'd rather have some of that red stuff." Some of that red stuff. And if you take me up on my dare to read Hebrews 12 this week, what you'll find is here is the way the writer of Hebrews summarizes Esau's life: wicked and godless. Wicked and godless. Then the chapter actually ends with these haunting words, "For you know that even afterwards, when Esau desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears."

May we be the polar opposite of that, huh? And by God's grace in many ways we are. I'm very, very thankful for the men and women who have served so faithfully this week in vacation Bible school. I understand that some of you are dead dog tired and you deserve

an extra hot dog today so go to the front of the line and eat up. Thank you for your faithful service and I mean that seriously and it's amazing how God is using all of that. You know, I don't think it's any accident at all that we just had the largest vacation Bible school in the history of this church this past week and I'm glad for that. My point is: don't be walking around the church property today down in the mouth about some decision of the Supreme Court. Jesus is on the throne. He's on the throne of grace. You say, "I want him to judge this country." Well, how far down do you want the judgment to go? So let's just pray for grace, huh? Let's pray for grace and let's thank the Lord for the freedom we have to proclaim the Gospel. And I don't think it's any surprise, I don't think it's any accident that the largest enrollment we've ever had in vacation Bible school was this week. I don't think it's any accident that three men and women placed their faith and trust in Christ in counseling on Monday. I think God is trying to communicate a message to this church family: Jesus is alive and we have all sorts of reasons to be the polar opposite of Esau. We're not going to disdain, despise our place in the plan and program of God, we're going to be amazed by his grace and we're all over whatever he has for us to do and that's what was happening with all these VBS workers.

We had so many great stories that came out of it. Let me just read one as we close. One of the workers said this, "We had," picture this, "we had several kids tells us that they have no Bible in their home." Can you imagine that? How many have you got in your house? You trip over the things. "We had several kids tell us that they have no Bible in their home and asked for a Bible which they, of course, received. One girl said she had never been in a church before." Isn't that amazing? People in this building, this week, first time ever being in a church. Listen to this, this tugged at my heart, "One boy came to me at the end of the night to return the Bible thinking it was just for that evening. I asked him if he would read it if I let him keep it. His eyes shone as he said yes. When his dad picked him up, he proudly showed him the Bible that he had received."

Now, those are people who are tired this morning. You're probably aching all over but it's a satisfied kind of tired, isn't it because you didn't despise your birthright. You embraced it because you're still amazed by his grace. Those are the kind of people God uses on his team.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

Father in heaven, it's a beautiful day. Thank you for it. And Lord, we have so many reasons to be thankful. We have so many reasons to be amazed by your grace and so, Lord, I pray that if we have been sitting in the background believing that you could not use us, I pray that we would step to the front. Lord, if we've hindered our ministry because we've carried ourselves in pride, I pray that we would step backward and, Lord, I pray that you'd never, never allow us to disdain the work that you have given us to do. Lord, I pray that we would seize the opportunities to serve you because we're still amazed by your grace. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.