

**Isaac - A failed life?
Churchill & Kingham - 25/10/2009**

Readings: Genesis 25:19-34; Genesis 27:1-10 & 18-28

Introduction

I've got 2 Proverbs for you to see if you can finish!

Here's the 1st: 'If you aim at nothing, you're sure to hit [it]!'

You have to aim at something to achieve anything; make plans, have goals & aspirations.

Most of us discover this too late, so my second proverb is:

'Youth is wasted on the [young]!'

If only I'd known then what I know now!

Then I would never have..... Fill in your own blanks!

So as a result, many of us who have been blessed with children start making plans for their lives.

We don't want them to make same mistakes we made.

What Dads don't do that for their sons; or mums for daughters?

Love compels us not only to plan for our lives, but for our children's, and work hard to bring those plans about.

One of our Godchildren is experiencing first hand what it is like to have parents planning your future.

So, what are your plans, what are you aiming at in life?

For yourself, for your children?

And how are your plans going?

Are they succeeding or going pear-shaped, or is the jury very much out at this point?

And is 'success', yours or your children's, how you measure the value of your life?

If so, how will you respond if your plans don't work out?

Will you consider your life a failure?

This autumn we're in Genesis, looking at some great lives.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, as in 'many colours'.

They're the patriarchs of the Jewish nation, but God planned to bring Jesus through their line, so they are also the patriarchs of the Christian faith.

I said these are great lives, but not because they were great.

In fact, they were liars, deceivers, abusers.

They led some of the Bible's most dysfunctional families.

No they certainly weren't great themselves, but their lives are great because of the way they point us to the sufficiency, the sovereignty and the mighty power of God.

The greatness of your life isn't how great you appear, to yourself or others, but how great God appears through you.

It's not measured by the success of your plans for your life, but how submissive you are to God's plans for your life.

These guys would not be remembered if it weren't for that.

And nor will you and nor will I.

Various Plans for Isaac

This week we turn to Isaac, whose life is incredibly messy!

Turn to Genesis 25v19 on p 24.

It's interesting how little we learn about Isaac's life.

For all we know, he may have been a great interior designer!

All we know is the ways he messed up!

In chapter 26 we read about how he made the same mistake his Father had made.

And in chapters 25 & 27, he makes new mistakes of his own.

Not sure what he would have had written on his gravestone, but it wouldn't have been great.

No, Isaac's life story doesn't focus on what he did, but on his relationships, especially with his sons Jacob and Esau.

Last week we saw how, by Abraham and his servant trusting in God's guidance, God provided Isaac with a wife, Rebekah.

Now Isaac was like any Dad, he had plans for his sons, especially Esau.

So let's consider Isaac's life in 4 stages: Gods' plan; Isaac's plan; which plan succeeds; and Isaac's response to that.

As we do that, consider your own life plans and where they are leading you and your family.

Do your plans lead to a life in which God is seen to be great?

God's Plan for Isaac

So what was God's plan for Isaac?

Well, it was given to Rebekah, Isaac's wife, not to Isaac.

Rebekah's pregnancy isn't an easy one, she's in a lot of pain.

Literally, the Hebrew here says the twins were crushing one another inside her.

Some of you here may know what that feels like!

So, v22 of chapter 25, she asks God 'Why is this happening to me?'

v23 'The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb..., and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other...'

And here's the surprising bit, "'the older will serve the younger.'"

So the younger son, Jacob, would be master and heir to all God's promises to his grandfather, Abraham.

The promise to make a great nation through him.

The promise of a land in which to live as God's people.

The promise of being able to live under God's kingly rule.

Now this is surprising when you consider the importance of the first born son in the culture of the ancient near east.

The firstborn had all the rights and inheritance.

It was an awesome privilege and responsibility.

And God's plan was to turn it all upside down.

This wasn't just about inheriting Isaac's very considerable estate, but God's particular blessings, those promises.

The New Testament makes very clear that the reason God is turning this upside down, is to show that His blessings are the result of His free grace, His kindness, His choice.

Not of our efforts, and not of the natural order of things.

Everyone would have expected Esau to receive the blessing.

But it wasn't just convention that God was overturning.

It also flew in the face of Isaac's preference as a dad.

Look at v27: 'The boys grew up, and Esau became a skilful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.'

Esau is this big, swarthy, red-skinned hunter; a real outdoor type; he leaps tall buildings in a single bound!

And Jacob?

Well, Jacob knew what a lentil was, and how to cook it.

You get the idea?

If Mummy's boy Jacob and his descendants are to lead Esau and his descendants, God will have to do it, because it's certainly not in the genes.

God will share his glory with no one.

He will be seen to be the great God who accomplishes his plans without anyone's help.

In the New Testament the apostle Paul wrote: "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; ... the weak things of the world to shame the strong... so that no-one may boast before him." 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

God had a plan for Isaac's sons and that plan would bring glory to God and God alone.

Through the building of the Jewish nation, but eventually, and most fully, through the birth of Jesus Christ, God's son.

If you're a Christian, do you have a vision for God's glory, or are you at the centre of your plans for your life?

Are you always the hero, the beneficiary, the organiser?

God has a plan to glorify not you, but himself, in and through your life.

He calls you to find your greatest fulfilment and satisfaction, just as Jesus did, in seeing Him glorified.

Jesus found it very freeing!

Isaac's Plan for Isaac

So how did Isaac respond to God's plan for his sons?

He didn't like it, so he made a different plan.

He wanted Esau, his favourite, to receive the blessing.

Look, as a non-parent, I don't do sermons on parenting!

I'll just say this and then move on.

Don't look to Isaac to teach you parenting skills!

There's my pearl of wisdom; let's move on!

So here's the plan.

Isaac knows he's dying.

So he tells Esau to go and hunt and prepare him a meal after which he will bless him.

That's nice!

Innocuous enough?

Well, notice the secrecy of the plan.

A Father passing on his blessing on his death bed was meant to be a family affair, sharing one last meal together.

To celebrate the passing of the torch to the next generation.

But it's the rest of the family that Isaac wants to avoid.

He doesn't want Rebekah saying something awkward like 'What about what God wanted?'

Or Jacob chirping up: 'But Dad, he sold it all to me - here's his signature.'

Deathbed blessings would normally be a prayer for God's blessing on all the kids; for health, prosperity, fruitfulness for all his children, but Isaac only wants it for Esau.

Of course, the blessings of the patriarchs for their children were far more than just health and wealth.

Abraham had been blessed by God, not his human father.

And God had appeared to Isaac and reaffirmed the blessing to him in chapter 26.

Abraham's blessing had the Word of God behind it and Isaac was trying to pass it to the wrong son; to his favourite; to Esau!

If you're sharp, you may have already spotted a problem with Isaac's plan.

Esau had already accomplished God's plan!

Esau had shown what he thought of his birthright and God's blessing in chapter 25, when he sold them to Jacob for a bowl of stew.

That's why Isaac needs secrecy.

[Whisper] 'Esau, go and hunt and prepare my favourite meal. Then I'll give you the blessing. Shhhh!'

He needed to fool his family and neighbours and he thought he could fool God as well.

Let me ask you, are there plans that God has made clear in his word, the Bible, but which you don't like and so you're making alternate plans?

Marriage hasn't turned out as you hoped, so you're looking elsewhere?

Might not be another person, might just be porn.

Your income isn't as great as you want, so you're cheating.

If you're single, are you seeking sex outside marriage?

If you're a teenager, are you tired of following your parent's authority, so you're planning to deceive them?

Whatever!

Beware of allowing your desires to dictate your life choices.

As a general rule, don't allow yourself to make important decisions on your own.

Trusting God's revealed will by faith is the far better way.

Making shortcuts and your own plans never hacks it.

If you're a Christian, consider something else as well - how blessed you are to know

God's plan for your life!

You know how to find joy and meaning in life.

God has already provided the plan for you in the Bible.

Don't worry about the little decisions such as who you should marry, where to live, what job or career.

The big decision is the one you've already made, to live God's way, a life of purpose and meaning, giving Him glory.

God's success, Isaac's failure

There are the 2 plans: God's and Isaac's.

So what happened?

Turns out that despite all the efforts at secrecy, Rebekah overhears, so she makes her own plan - goats skin, Esau's dirty clothes, the lot!

As a result, Isaac, who thought he was cleverly deceiving his family and God, is himself deceived!

The blessing, which God had declared was Jacob's before either boy was born, goes to Jacob after all.

And notice the language that he uses!

He prays that nations will bow down to Jacob, thinking it is Esau, and that he will be lord over his brother's family.

Isaac the deceiver is caught in Rebekah's deception, and the punishment, which he inflicts on himself, perfectly fits the crime.

God won't be mocked.

He is sovereign.

He'll use even our own rebellion to accomplish his plan.

That's no problem for the Almighty, as Proverbs 16:9 says:

"In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps".

Never is that more clear than in God's plans for salvation.

None of the characters in the story deserved God's blessing.

Esau was more interested in his stomach than in God's ways and later, in a strop, he took foreign wives who further led him away from God.

Jacob, and Rebekah were lying deceivers.

Isaac was probably the worst of all, knowingly going against his family and God's clear and revealed will.

But, in the midst of all this sin, this nastiness, God is gracious and does bring blessing to mankind through Jacob's line, just as He had planned.

It is in the nature of God to freely give to the undeserving.

To people like me and you.

That's what makes Him so great!

Isaac's response

Some of you may be thinking that in the New Testament Isaac is commended to us as a man of faith.

And you're thinking, 'What'?

Well Hebrews commends Isaac to us as a model of faith not for what we've just read - there's no good model there - but for of what happens next, after the bits we had read to us.

In chapter 27v33 we read 'Isaac trembled violently' when the real Esau turns up.

He's not angry - the word means trembling due to fright.

Isaac was afraid of the living God, and well he might be!

He knows he's been caught out.

Convicted of his sin and foolishness, he doesn't run & hide.

No, he acknowledges that what God has done is right.

He doesn't rail against Jacob and against life's unfairness like Esau does 3 verses later.

Isaac says simply at the end of verse 33 'I blessed him - and indeed he will be blessed.'

Isaac's words of blessing weren't some magic spell!

They merely reflected God's revealed will, back in chapter 25, words that must have been ringing loudly in Isaac's ears.

Isaac responds in submission to God.

He would have saved everyone so much hassle and pain and upset if he'd only done that from the off.

But most of us are too full of ourselves, too proud, too self-reliant and too sure we know best.

'Youth is wasted on the young!'

There was even more repentance needed.

He must also acknowledge God's plan for Esau, the son he loved best, and that's what he does.

Isaac pronounces God's words over his favourite son.

He says the words that he'd spent his life trying to avoid.

How hard it must have been to say to the son he loved: 'You will serve your brother.'

Nearing death, Isaac learned that God's plan will be fulfilled.

Conclusion

The life of faith, Jesus said, calls us to die to ourselves.

If you've not yet done that, following Christ is costly.

It means abandoning whatever you hold dear that stands opposed to God.

It means dying to yourself.

That's a great cost, and I understand that, I've done it!

But think of what Jesus said you will gain!

Your very own soul!

Saved for all eternity from Hell and God's judgment.

An eternal life with plans and meaning that will be for your and other's very best.

Plans that will bring God glory in your life.

How much is that worth to you?

But Christian faith isn't grudging acceptance, nor some fatalistic acceptance of the will of an irresistible God.

It's a joyful dependence on Him and embracing of His plan.

Read on in chapter 28 and you'll see how willingly and enthusiastically Isaac now embraces God's plans.

If you're not yet a Christian, I want to encourage you to seriously consider doing exactly that.

Get back in step with God through Jesus' death for you.

But let me close with a word to the Christians here.

Does this describe your faith?

The joyful and willing embracing of God's plans for your life?

You may say 'yes', but what if God's plan includes suffering?

What then?

Faith can't sustain you through tough times if it's only masquerading as faith during the good times.

If you have no real relationship with g; no real trust and dependence on Him.

But real Christian faith can – real faith 'sets its eyes on Jesus who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and there sat down at the right hand of God'.

What are you aiming at?

Where are your eyes fixed?

Whose plan are you trusting in?

Prayer (do business)