

Bethel Christian Church  
*In God Alone*

**Jacob:** Stealer of Blessings, Receiver of Grace

In this short series we have been seeking to hear what God says to the church through the not so perfect men and women he chose to lead his people. Already the principle of grace has become central in their varied stories. We may have missed this in the past because of the tendency to turn these men and women of faith into heroes, larger than life individuals with spiritual resources beyond the grasp of normal human beings. Any open reading of their stories would disavow us of such illusions. What shines through them all is the covenant mercy and faithfulness of God. He is the primary focus, not their so called inherent faith or piety. The man God appointed to be the father of Israel is a prime example of this point. Jacob was a flawed man, a sinner all his days. What then is God's testimony to his church through Jacob?

Less is written in the New Testament about Jacob than Abraham and Moses. Perhaps we could call him the most controversial of the Patriarchs. Which ever way we look at his story he was not your most attractive role model for simple, guileless trust in God.

- His name meant 'clutcher' which has been developed into one who supplants (to take the place or position of somebody by force or intrigue).
- He was a deceiver and a politician (a user of people).
- He was a coward.
- He had deep dysfunctional issues within his family.

For those who cling to moralism he would have been the last one to choose to become the father of Israel. How often the church still looks to personality strengths and moral impeccability as being good building blocks for God to use. We look to the popular, the famous and the successful and feel that if only God could convert them they would have a really successful ministry. Paul's rebuke should echo in our ears, "Consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong.... that no man should boast before God" (1 Corinthians 1:26, 27, 29).

Jacob was such a man. But this was the man God chose to father the twelve tribes of Israel. But more amazingly this was the one who claimed to have seen God face to face. Jacob was the first person in history (as recorded in the Bible) to hear the words from God "I am with you". This was the man who saw the vision of the ladder to heaven and angels (of the nations) ascending and descending under God's rule.

So as with those we have considered before the feature of their lives is the presence of the Living God forging out his covenant purposes, not just for these individuals, or even Israel but the nations. We see the grace and glory of God not some emerging spirituality of good people that God is able to use. God's is the active one in the task of getting his plan completed.

Jacob's task was to see the presence and glory of God and be the beacon for his people to follow that salvation: To gladly acknowledge that salvation history is all of God.

This is precisely how the NT speaks of Jacob. Listen to God's testimony about himself and his ways as seen through Jacob.

*<sup>6</sup>But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, <sup>7</sup>and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." <sup>8</sup>This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. <sup>9</sup>For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son." <sup>10</sup>And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, <sup>11</sup>though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— <sup>12</sup>she was told, "The older will serve the younger." <sup>13</sup>As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."*

(Romans 9:6-13)

Paul had just been telling the Romans how God richly blessed Israel:

*To them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. <sup>5</sup>To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen (Romans 9:4, 5).*

But if God promised them these things how come Israel in Paul's time was in such bad shape? These blessings had been rejected and so too the Messiah in whom all these promises were completely accomplished and delivered to them.

Paul's explanation was to teach that being the true Israel was not a physically inherited thing.

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Paul was clear that nobody can make claims on God by reason of their birth, culture or religion. It all has to do with God's promise, God's elective mercy.

*it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.*

Enter Jacob

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Against all 'natural' law and against all cultural dictates, Jacob was to be God's chosen line not Esau. Against all protocol and culture Esau who would be the first born of twins would serve Jacob who was born second.

Was God just being smart, or unexplainably partial? Was he just making a point about who was in control? No, he was making a point about the principle he had established from the beginning. His covenant promise would be given and implemented by his free choosing. Jacob became the continuing illustration of God's way of grace.

Paul nails home the point by pointing out to us that God's choosing of Jacob was pre-natal. The two boys were still in their mother's womb when God's promise came to Rebekah saying Jacob is my chosen one. Why is this such a telling piece of revelation? The logic is clear. Neither Jacob nor Esau had yet been born so God's choice could not have been based upon the good works or bad works of either boy. We know with hind sight that Jacob could never have been chosen because of his good character or moral fibre. So God was ruling out what humanity takes as norm when people are chosen for important tasks. The world's logic is like this. God chooses those who receive the promise for either, the good works they have already done or the potential for good works he sees in them.

Likewise the two boys in the womb had no opportunity to have faith. So God's election of Jacob was not based upon his decision to trust God. So God's choice of Jacob was by grace alone. It was not based upon any foreseen faith or activity or lack of it in either of the twins. This is what the theologians refer to as God's freedom. Nothing moves his hand, not even his own love for that would make love the sovereign. This is not only a glorious thing on God's part but a wonderful grace to his children. They may never look at anything they are, have been or will be as determining the blessing and security of God's covenant communion.

### **What was God's purpose in choosing Jacob?**

For Jacob: That he might see the riches of the glory of God's grace and love and glorify him forever. In this way he would be able to direct his sons to the whole purpose of God for them and their future families.

For the world: That we might see that the riches of god's glorious love is not flooded upon us because we have done good and moral things; given the indication that we would make good believers; but solely because God chose to give it to us.

So God calls us not because he sees that we will make good believers. God calls us so that we might fall on our faces when we see the undeserved grace of that call and praise him that our salvation is all of God.

Our salvation, sanctification and glorification are all by his action. Therefore our hearts can truly rest in his love, live in the peaceful freedom from self justification, and with a clear conscience look forward unreservedly to the hope which lies before us.

