

# Good is Not Enough

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, you probably wouldn't be able to tell this just by looking at me, but the truth is, I love fairytale endings. Yes, I know that may surprise a few of you, but I do.

Just this week, Emma, and thank you Emma for allowing me to use your example, Emma had a debating assignment where she had to argue in the affirmative that fairytales perpetuate gender stereotypes.

Now, she wanted me to help her with more arguments to support her case, but to be honest, I couldn't really help her, because I really have nothing against fairytales or fairytale endings.

And so I'm going to let you in on a big secret of mine, but you do have to promise not to tell anyone else. No posting on Facebook or circulating on WhatsApp. Is that a promise?

No? No. All right. I did hear someone say yes, so here it is. And this is it, all right. The first time I watched Finding Nemo, I actually cried at the reunion scene near the end.

[ 1 : 08 ] You know that screenshot, that one? Have you watched it? Yeah. Yeah, where Marlon, Dad, finally finds Nemo after he's been gone, been in the dentist, fish tank and all that.

I actually cried. I don't think anyone saw me. The cinema was dark. But I had to pretend to remove that speck from my eye in order to wipe away the tears.

But there you have it. I cried. I cried because I loved fairytale endings. On the other hand, I know of this other famous play written by this someone, William someone or other, where the ending was just terrible.

Because not only did one male character, the lead male character die, which you expect sort of in things like Korean dramas or something, but the female main character died as well.

And what kind of unsatisfactory ending is that? And I'm sure you know what play I'm talking about, right? Romeo and Juliet, yeah. Well, one more thing.

[ 2 : 13 ] Let's say, for example, I did witness two sisters fighting and quarreling with each other, which, you know, breaks my heart. But then to my great delight, I soon find them kissing and making up, or maybe just hugging.

That sort of makes my day when I see that happen. Because there, right there, is another happy ending. Another happy ending until the next fight, of course.

But we wouldn't worry about that tonight. But to see people make up, to see people reconcile, those are fairytale endings, aren't they? And they really do warm my heart.

And so as we come to our passage tonight, it would probably not surprise you to know that I particularly enjoy this passage. As you know, this whole series began with a feud between Esau and Jacob, brothers wrestling even while they were in their mother's womb.

And as a result, Jacob had to flee the land, and is only now returning. And last week, we saw Jacob preparing to face his brother again, hoping to be reconciled.

[ 3 : 20 ] But we were left without knowing the ending to that story. And so, to now see the way things turn out tonight, must surely bring a tear to my eyes, or your eyes, I hope.

Because it's been 20 long years. Just think about it. Some of you are not even 20 yet. And it's been 20 years where Jacob has been wondering if Esau will ever talk to him again, or worse, whether he would hunt him down to kill him.

Only to have all those fears melt away when he finally meets him tonight. And so, at this start of the chapter, what we have is Jacob leaving his all-night wrestle with God, verse 1 of chapter 33, and he looks up, and there was Esau coming with 400 men.

Now, this is, I think, the final moment of suspense in the entire story, where Jacob is still unsure of Esau's reaction. And so, what he does is he divides his family.

He gets his maidservants to go up front first with their children, then Leah and her children next, and then finally, his favorite wife, Rachel, and his favorite son, Joseph, bringing up the rear. [ 4 : 37 ] Jacob himself, verse 33, went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother. But Esau, ever the one to sort of wear his heart on his sleeve, he ran to meet Jacob, and he embraced him.

He threw his arms around his neck and kissed him, and they wept. And so, this is the fairy tale ending that I was talking about. Or, as my outline says, feuding brothers, friends again. Now, what happens immediately after is that, as you do with family reunions between long-lost relatives, you introduce the rest of your family. Who are these with you, Esau asks. Are they the children God has graciously given your servant, Jacob replies. And then he proceeds to introduce them to Esau in the same order that they were divided into. And like Jacob, each of the members of the family, too, in turn, shows deference to Esau, bowing down as they greet him. And then Esau's attention turns to the droves, or the herds, that greeted him along the way. These were the gifts, if you remember from last week, which now Jacob tells Esau, in verse 9, were given to find favor in your eyes, my Lord.

[ 5 : 58 ] Now, as it turns out, Jacob probably didn't need to do it. But all these things, the gifts, the bowing, the deferential language, calling him my Lord, all this showed Jacob's great desire to be reconciled.

And in turn, Esau is just as magnanimous. So initially he says, no thank you, I don't want your gifts, Jacob. I already have plenty, he says in verse 9, my brother, keep what you have for yourself. It's all rather surprising turn of events, isn't it? Because when we saw Esau last, he was filled with rage, wasn't he? He was biding his time to wait for his dad to die before he would kill his brother. He was angry because Jacob had stolen his once in a lifetime blessing. And yet, now he turns down the gifts that Jacob wants to give him.

He even calls Jacob, do you see, my brother. Now, Jacob, this one-time deceiver, well, he's not going to be easily refused. He said, no please, said Jacob, if I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me, for to see your face is like seeing the face of God.

[ 7 : 13 ] Now that you've received me favorably, please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me, and I have all I need. And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.

How they've both changed, haven't they? And for the better as well. Now, Jacob, we know, has changed because of what God has done with him. Esau, on the other hand, is not so clear, is it? Because we don't have a history of his life during these intervening years. But certainly, he's a better man, isn't he? Gentler, and willing to forgive. And you sort of got to contrast this with Jacob's encounter with Laban, where there was still that argy-bargy, wasn't there?

Right up to the end between him and Laban. Here, you really couldn't ask for anything more, can you, from the brothers? Hugs and kisses, it really warms the heart.

Well, that's the first half of the story, but let's turn to the second half, where now, Esau invites Jacob to see her with him. Now, this is simply, I think, to return the favor that Jacob, in return for the favor of Jacob's gifts to him.

[ 8 : 32 ] But notice that Jacob hesitates. He says in verse 13, My Lord knows that the children are tender, and that I must care for the ewes and the cows that are nursing their young. If they are driven hard just one day, all the animals will die.

So let my Lord go ahead of his servant while I move along slowly at the pace of the flocks and herds before me and the pace of the children until I come to my Lord in Seir.

Now, we know by the end of the story that actually Jacob had no intentions of going, but Esau doesn't know this. And so, in a further act of generosity, he says, Well, then let me leave some men with you.

They will help you to come with me at your pace. But Jacob, again, wouldn't have any of that. Still, he doesn't quite bring himself to reject Esau outright, does he?

Instead, his response is, But why do that? Jacob asks. Just let me find favor in the eyes of my Lord. That is, I've already found favor with you. That's all that I can ask of you.

[ 9 : 33 ] I cannot accept anything more in return. And so, what we have is Esau then returning to Seir with his 400 men and Jacob going instead to Sukkoth.

The name is given because Sukkoth means booths or shelters, which he's built for his livestock. And then, sometime later, we don't know how long, he finally crosses the Jordan River and he comes to the city of Shechem in Canaan.

And just like Abraham before him, he buys a piece of land from Hamar or Hamal, the Shechemite, and he pitches his hand there and builds an altar to the Lord and he calls it El Elohei, Israel, or meaning, if you look down at your footnotes, mighty is the God of Israel.

And so, here we see for the first time, Jacob actually assuming his new name. God was no longer the God of Jacob, but the God of Israel, the name he was given at the wrestle.

And if you look at the map, Shechem, is actually in the promised land, is that final dot on your left, which is left of the river. So you see, God has actually brought Jacob back to the promised land just as he's promised that he would all those many years and chapters ago.

[10:55] And so, although Jacob never says so explicitly, this is the real reason why he turned down Esau's invitation. Because going to Seir, going down there to the south, would have meant staying away from the promised land.

All credit to Jacob, he actually remembered God's promises to him. He remembered specifically God's instruction which says to go back to the land of his fathers. And so, actually, for him to refuse Esau was an act of faith.

It meant that he believed the promised land is where God wanted him to be. Even though, as we see, by him having to buy land, the whole of the promised land was still occupied by others.

And so, the main point of this second half of the story is clear. Again, it's in my outline. Wandering Jacob is at home at last. Wandering Jacob is now in the land when God has promised to bless him and his descendants after him as well.

And so, all the stuff that's been happening in Jacob's life, from the very moment he's left the promised land, all comes to a resolution now, doesn't it? All his worries, everything that he's been longing for, he's got his happy ending, his fairy tale ending.

[12:14] He's at peace with his brother and he's at home with his God. Well, that's the story in a nutshell in the chapter. But, I just want to reflect for a moment for the rest of tonight on the brothers and what they've done, what they've each done.

And let me start by asking you this question. If we were just to go by what you've read in this passage tonight, who do you think is the better person? Would you think Jacob?

Or would you think Esau? Who do you think is the better person? Well, certainly, we would like it to be Jacob, right? Because we've been following his story, he's the hero. And, as we look at it, there's no question that his actions were admirable.

The fact that he was conciliatory to Esau, his gifts, the way he tries to make amends for what he's done to Esau, all those are really good things, things that you expect of a good person.

But I have to say that Esau too comes across as a very good person, doesn't he? Maybe even better than Jacob, I would argue, because Jacob, for all you know, has done everything only to save his skin.

[13:25] Esau, on the other hand, there's really nothing for him to gain, is there, for him to be generous. After all, Isaac's blessing is still Jacob's, he hasn't got it back, and he's no longer living in the land of promise.

Perhaps, his own wealth and power may have soothed his anger, may have quelled the rage from those many years ago, but you know what, I've seen other people who have become rich and powerful, and they still continue to nurse a grudge with people that they've had a long time ago, and the passing of time has not actually allowed them to forgive.

And so I think Esau's willingness to forgive is actually very impressive. And it's even more so when we see that he doesn't even accept, initially that is, any of the gifts that Jacob would want to give to him.

And so, if you ask me, if I had to choose, my vote actually is for Esau. I think Esau is the better person. But, you know, even if you don't agree with me, I think you can't argue with the fact that Esau wasn't a good person.

Because he's done all the right things here, hasn't he? Much more than, perhaps I would have even done, much more than you would expect from a normal person. And yet, and yet, if we look at our New Testament reading tonight, the Bible's verdict is that good is not enough, is it?

[14:57] So, with the slide on the verse, it says, God says that the older will serve the younger. And then he says this, and Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.

Now, of course, God's hate for Esau is not like our human kind of hate. It's not an emotional or vindictive response. Rather, it's the Bible's way of saying that God has bypassed Esau with blessing.

That despite the good that Esau has done, that is, treating Jacob kindly, forgiving him, being generous to him, none of these was enough to merit God's blessing.

but let me say it again. What Esau did were good things. Don't get me wrong. Things that he did well to do, he did, he was a good person.

He did good things, but at the end of the day, they were not the things that God looked for when it came to his favor. It's not enough, in other words, to earn God's favor.

[16:05] Good is simply not enough. Instead, God's favor fell on Jacob. Now, why is that? Well, I think just because.

It wasn't that Jacob was a better person. He certainly wasn't. But God blessed Jacob because he chose to. It's pure grace, in other words. And so, where good is not enough, God's grace is.

Now, for us who are rational, who have an innate sense of fairness, this does come across as something really hard to accept, isn't it? How can it be that good is not enough?

But lest we think that this means God is unfair, while Paul continues to say in Romans 9 and verse 14, what then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all.

But I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. And so, the truth is, nobody deserves God's blessing.

[17:07] That's why it's mercy, not merit. Not even Jacob deserves God's blessing. But in God's grace, he decides to choose from among the undeserving, some he will bless.

And as we come back to Genesis 13 again, you'll see that actually Jacob realizes this grace that God has shown him. For he mentions it time and time again.

So, verse 5, he says, of the children, they are the children God has graciously given to me. And this statement is all the more remarkable when we recall actually how difficult it was for Jacob to come by those children.

First, he had to overcome Laban's deceit, then Rachel's barrenness, and then the infighting between his wives. Then again, in verse 11, Jacob says of his herds, please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me, and I have all I need.

And again, if you've been following the series, think how hard it was for Jacob to come by these herds. There were years of hard labor under Laban, weren't they? And then Laban started to allocate those sheep in a way that was actually biased against Jacob.

[18:27] But despite all these things, despite Jacob's efforts, he saw that it was God's grace that provided for him. And then finally, when it comes even to his reconciliation with Esau, he says that even this is God's grace.

So you see there in the passage, Jacob's constant request to Esau was that he might find favor with him. But right there in the middle in verse 10, if you look at that, we see Jacob ultimately looked to someone else as the source of that favor.

And that person is God. Behind Esau's show of favor, Jacob sees God's hand, or should we say God's face.

So we read, If I have found favor in your eyes, Esau, accept this gift from me, for to see your face, that is, to see your face and the favor that goes with it, is like seeing the face of God, now that you've received me favorably.

And so what Jacob does is he connects his experience of God, seeing God's face, if you recall just the night before, and being blessed by God, he connects that with what he's witnessing right in front of his eyes.

[19:39] This forgiveness and favor that Esau is showing is actually a blessing from God. Jacob sees in Esau's favor and face, the face of God who favors him.

Now in contrast, did you notice that Esau actually makes no mention of God? Even though he himself is forgiving and generous, he does not attribute anything to God, neither his own wealth or power, or his own actions.

This, Esau, this was a man actually without a relationship with God. He had no relationship with God even though he was the son of Isaac and the son of Abraham, just like Jacob.

So friends, when you look back at your own life so far, whether they have been many years like some of us or few, how do you see the blessings or the good things in your life?

Do you ever think that I get them because I deserve them? That you've worked hard for your success? Or that you've been faithful to God, you've come to church, you've served him for many years, you deserve it?

[ 20 : 55 ] Or do you think it's because I've got the right theology, I'm Bible believing, I'm reformed, that's why I deserve to be blessed? Or do you see actually that you've been blessed because of God's grace?

That yes, being faithful to God and doing good things is right and proper, but actually it earns you no credit before God. Well, I have to say that two weeks ago, hearing all you're sharing really encouraged me because that's on Thanksgiving Sunday by the way, because it helps me to see that many of you do realize, do know that it is God's grace and that it is God's grace that is the sole basis of your blessing in life.

And so I simply want to then just encourage you to keep going, to continue with this life and habit of Thanksgiving, to cultivate a mindset where whether life is up or life is down, we keep remembering and seeing God's grace in everything in our lives.

And as we do maintain a heart of Thanksgiving, whether we feel like it or not, whether life is tough and getting us down or not, to just have the habit of saying, thank you God for showing me your grace.

Because to know and understand God's grace, that is what it means to be a Christian. Being a Christian is not about being good. It's not about doing good in order to win God's favor.

[ 22 : 28 ] Instead, being a Christian is about realizing that good is not enough. That the only good enough person is Jesus, his son. And it's by trusting in him, in what he did on the cross, that's what merits, or that's not even merit, that's what allows God to show favor on us.

Of course, as we respond then to God's grace, yeah, of course, we do good and we live God's way, but that does not precede God's grace. It's not a precondition for God's favor, but a result of it.

Well, there's one last thing I want to just mention tonight, and that is to realize as well that the type of blessing that God here is promising is not as we expect often, measured in the currency and standards of this world.

A blessing does not mean worldly status or power, nor achievements that men or women can applaud. Instead, the blessing that God desires for us is to be in relationship with Him in Christ. That is the true blessing in our lives, to know Him and to be known by Him, not just in this life, but for all eternity. Now, friends, many of you have seen the Meerkat ad.

[ 23 : 44 ] Have you seen Compare the Meerkat? .com? Yeah, you know this one, right? Where they compare two products. Well, I want to conclude tonight by comparing the market, as it were, not between two car insurance products, or, you know, banking products, but between the lives of these two brothers.

Now, if we compare both their lives and the outcomes of it by worldly standards, then I think many of us would think that Esau has come out in front, wouldn't we? He's the one, if you read the Bible, who on the face of it has the more blessed life.

So, yes, Jacob has wives, children, flocks, and servants, but this was nothing compared to Esau. Esau would have had so many servants that he could afford to take 400 men with him at the drop of a hat to meet Jacob.

Likewise, Jacob's gifts were generous, but Esau must surely have much more than that, so much that he doesn't need or feel the need to accept Jacob's. And while Jacob had to buy a plot of land from Hamor, Esau had the entire country of Seir.

Now, we won't have time to look in detail at it, but if you go to chapter 36, and just flip at it for a moment, you'll find an entire chapter on Esau's descendants.

[ 25 : 07 ] And if you actually compare it to all the other genealogies in Genesis, this is the longest genealogy in the book. Longer than Ishmael's in chapter 25, and longer than even Jacob's in 46.

And actually, it's even longer than the list of nations in chapter 10. And throughout this chapter 36, Esau's descendants are designated as chiefs of tribes.

And then if you look at verse 31, just that one verse, we read that it says, these were the kings who reigned in Edom before any Israelite king reigned.

And then after that, every son that is listed is listed as a king. In other words, Esau was the head of a rich and powerful dynasty. He's almost like the equivalent of Queen Elizabeth today.

Or if you want to use a business analogy, he's like the Murdoch or Packer family. And yet, what does God say? Esau, I hated, but Jacob, I loved.

[ 26 : 18 ] In the end, Esau's riches and power counted for nothing before God. And the blessings that he had, so-called on earth, turned out not to be lasting blessings anyway.

And God would in time bless Jacob in his own way. Jacob would become a powerful nation as well in the promised land. And even Israel at one stage became the ruler over Edom.

But more importantly, in time, what God did to bless Jacob was to send a son of Israel, whose name is Jesus, who became king not only over Israel, but over all the nations, and in fact, over all creation.

And so, as you compare the life of Esau and Jacob, compare the market as it were, whose life would you rather have? Esau's with its worldly riches and power today, or Jacob's, even though it comes with all the possibility of hardship and suffering.

Well, ultimately, who you choose depends on the type of blessing you fix your eyes on, doesn't it? Is it the blessing that comes by God's grace, or is it the blessing that comes, you think, from you being good enough, material riches and worldly success, that seems to pass off for God's blessing, but actually isn't?

[ 27 : 46 ] Well, I trust that you would choose God's eternal blessing, the one that comes by God's grace through Christ alone. And if that's the case, then let us hold on to God's promise and be thankful to God for what he has done for us in Christ and in his life.

Well, let's pray. Father, thank you for all you've done for us, in feeding us and clothing us and providing for all that we need.

There are times, though, when we feel that life is hard and unfair and that we don't deserve the suffering or failure that comes our way. Help us in those times to continue to trust in you and in your son, Jesus.

Help us to hear the words of your promise that every spiritual blessing is ours in Christ Jesus. And that even in this life, if in this life, we may not have physical comfort, that you will nevertheless bring us into glory in your perfect time.

And, Father, for those of us who do enjoy blessings in this life, help us not to be proud, nor to see our blessings as something which we deserve because we're good or have done good things.

[ 29 : 03 ] Instead, help us to give thanks daily for your abundant grace, for loving us even when we have fallen away from you. and calling us back into relationship with you, helping us to repent humbly and to walk in the new way of life in the Spirit.

Father, help us to keep doing that by the power of your Spirit. We pray this and ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.