

The hairy trick

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[0 : 00] I don't know what we made of that story as Christiane read to us. We said a couple of weeks ago at the start of this series in Genesis that a real life story! of family fallout and fighting brothers is so bang up to date, isn't it?

I don't know if you bought Prince Harry's book spare, I have not yet. Whether you make of Prince Harry's recent revelations, he grabbed me by the collar, ripping my necklace and he knocked me to the floor.

Whatever you suspect about royal family relationships behind closed doors, I'd have thought all of that drama playing out in the public at the moment pales next to this chapter in the life of this family. Do you not think? Because this is such a hyper tense, highly charged, high stakes moment. As 40 years of family dysfunction and grating and struggle just kind of bursts out into plotting and lying and screaming and grudge.

I wonder what you made of it. We did start this series in Genesis two Sundays ago in chapter 25. It's chapter 25 to 35.

[1 : 08] And it's what chapter 25 verse 19 at the start of this section says, is the family line of Abraham's son Isaac. What we're looking at is everything that comes from Isaac.

And from one angle, these guys are just a random, ordinary little family. They're a man and a wife wanting kids, trying to survive in a tough world almost 4000 years ago. So.

And yet, Isaac, chapter 25 verse 19 says, is Abraham's son. And that is really significant because Abraham is the man whom God chose.

And of all the people at the time living in our sinful, fallen, dying world back then, God chose Abraham. And he promised Abraham that through his descendants, God would save and bless our world for good.

That is, God is going to act to restore people like you and me to himself. And he will do this, he promises thousands of years ago through Abraham's family.

[2 : 14] And from Abraham comes Isaac. And further down the line, we'll meet 12 brothers and then the nation of Israel. And finally, Jesus Christ, our saviour. That's what's going to happen.

But back here at this point, God's promises to bless the world rest on Isaac. And what comes from him? And yet what comes from Isaac is really not pretty, to say the least.

Bring us up to speed. In chapter 5, 25, the introduction, Rebecca, Isaac's wife, gets pregnant. And in her womb, the babies smash into each other. And she feels this fighting.

And she says, Lord, what's going on? And God replies, you've got two nations in there. And they will struggle and the elder will serve the younger. That's my decision. That's my choice.

That's what's going to happen. As the boys are born, hairy boy Esau comes out first. Followed by his younger brother Jacob, who's grabbing his heel and battling for position.

[3 : 16] As they grow up, Esau is a hairy, wild hunter. And Isaac, his dad, loves a bit of tasty meat. And so he favours Esau, your daddy's special boy, he says.

Whereas Jacob is more whole and civilised. And Rebecca loves him. Family favouritism. Which is not good. And then one day, when they're grown up, Esau stomps in from the field, a drooling, all animal-like.

And he wants some of Jacob's red stew. And Jacob sees his moment and he makes his move. Cold, calculating. Sell me your God-given birthright. I want your firstborn place of honour in the family.

And I'll give you some stew. Is that a deal? And Esau doesn't have any time for the things of God. Just wants to fill his face. And so he does the deal, makes the swap.

He despises his place in the family and he eats and drinks and lumbers off. And so it's 1-0 to Jacob. In this apparently God-chosen family.

[4 : 22] With all the seeds of envy and struggle planted and growing and festering. In our passage today. After chapter 26.

It's kind of pre-kids flashback for Isaac and Rebecca. We're back with it again. And this morning. This family splitting day. That 40 years have been building to.

A couple of things I want to say this morning. As we follow through the drama. Do you agree with this? What a scheming, deceiving, lying, crying family of sinners.

God's chosen family is. Do you agree with that? What a scheming, deceiving, lying, crying family of sinners. They are. Here we go.

Just before the action. Follow it along with me. There's something to know about Esau. In verse 34. When Esau was 40 years old. He married Judith. Daughter of Beri the Hittite.

[5 : 23] And also Basimath. Daughter of Elon the Hittite. Is that good? It isn't. For 20 years. Esau didn't care much for the things of God.

20 years ago. He traded away his birthright. Hungry for stew. And now. Aged 40. Because people don't change that much. He's taken wives from outside Abraham's family.

Like he doesn't care much. About building family life on God's commandments. Because he doesn't. And they were a source of bitter grief to Isaac and Rebekah.

As they brought their lifestyle into God's family. Through godless Esau. So bear that in mind. That's Esau. Now the action.

Scene 1. Starting with Isaac. Who was old. Verse 1. About 100. With cloudy unseeing eyes. Lying on his couch.

[6 : 23] And he called for Esau. His older son. The godless one. And said to him. My son. Here I am. He answered. And Isaac says. I've got one thing on my bucket list.

Before I go. How about some of that wild game? How about some of that? Verse 4. Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like. And bring it to me to eat. So that I may give you my blessing before I die. What is that? The innocent wish of a doddering dad? I don't think it is. Back in those days. The family leader passes on his blessing.

In a public whole family affair. That's how it's meant to be. As the family gathers round. This is a secret plan. Just you and me.

Esau. My favourite boy. It's a secret plan. In defiance of the word God had spoken. That the elder Esau.

[7 : 22] Would serve the younger. Jacob. Jacob. I don't know if you think all old people are sweet. Isaac is ancient. He's got cataracts. He's not got long to go maybe.

He isn't a sweet and harmless old man. His appetite and his favouritism blind him. And his mind still works just fine. Whatever the Lord might have said.

I'll get blessing for my godless son. But. Scene 2. Verses 5 to 17. Rebecca. She was listening.

As Isaac spoke to his son Esau. She suspected I guess. Do you think? Didn't trust her man. Had her ear to the curtain. And when Esau left for the open country.

To hunt game and bring it back. Rebecca said to her son Jacob. See that? Isaac and his son. Rebecca and her son.

[8 : 23] A family divided. They've taken sides. Which is so poisonous. In families. Isn't it? And if Isaac's got a secret plan.

Rebecca too can scheme. She says to Jacob. Quick as a flash. Listen up and do what I say. Get out there right now. And bring two choice young goats. And I'll prepare the tasty food your father loves.

And then verse 10. You take it to your father to eat. So that he may give you his blessing. Before he dies. How cunning. She's going to grab God's promised blessing.

For the one she loves. Now Jacob has no moral objections. Doesn't say this isn't right mum. Just thinks it won't work. Because verse 11.

My brother Esau's a hairy man. Well I'm a smooth kind of guy. What if my father touches me? What if he touches me? I would appear to be tricking him. Too right you would.

[9 : 23] And would bring down a curse on myself. Rather than a blessing. The reason this is all such high stakes by the way. Just stepping out of the story for a moment.

Is because we're talking about God's blessing. And God's curse. To be in God's world under God's blessing. Means you experience God's favour. He says come to me and live.

There's nothing better. Then or today. To be in God's world under God's curse. Means you experience God's fury. He says get away from me and die.

There's nothing worse. Back then. And today. It is very high stakes what's going on here. Because all of life is such high stakes. Here.

In life. And in eternity. And Jacob's concerned. Says I don't want to bring down a curse on myself. So mum says my son let the curse fall on me.

[10:19] Just do what I say. So he does. He gets the goats. And she prepares them. And then. What a scheme. She takes her elder son's best clothes. And puts them on her younger son.

She dresses him. Like a little boy. He'll smell like Esau. And then verse 16. She also covered his hands. And the smooth part of his neck.

With the goat skins. I'm turning you into hairy boy. We're going to trick your blind dad. And then she handed to her son Jacob. The tasty food. And the bread that she'd made.

That's Rebecca. She is razor sharp. She knows God's promise. She's a tiger mum. She is happy to deceive. To get what she wants.

Brackets. And what God wants. For her boy. Isaac. Rebecca. And so now here we go. Look. Scene three. Verses 18 to 29.

[11:15] And game on. This is the moment. As he. Jacob. Now went to his father. You imagine it. Do you imagine Jacob's heart. Beating a touch faster.

As he enters. And fearfully. Hesitantly maybe. My father. Blindly the old man answers.

Here I am. Who are you my son. Deep breath. A first lie. I am Esau. Your first born.

I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game. So that you may give me your blessing. Will it be enough? No. Isaac asked his son.

How did you find it so quickly my son? Gulp. Rebecca hadn't thought of that. Jacob. The Lord your God gave me success.

[12:14] He replied. Lie number two. And misusing the name of the Lord. Sins on top of lies. And then Isaac said to Jacob.

Does he suspect? Do you think? Come near so I can touch you my son. To know whether you really are my son Esau or not. So picture Jacob now.

Hands sweating under the goat skin. Shuffling forward to his father. Will the goat skin slip? Will Isaac discover? Isaac touched him and said.

The voice is the voice of Jacob. But the hands are the hands of Esau. He did not recognize him. For his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau. Rebekah's scheme.

Jacob's lies. They're working. And so Isaac proceeded to bless him. Before one final straight question. Are you really my son Esau?

[13:14] He asked. Do you not think it's true that the more we lie. The easier it gets. Are you really my son Esau?

I am. He replied. And so Isaac thinking his secret plan is working. Says my son bring me some of your game to eat.

So I may give you my blessing. And so Jacob brought it to him. And he ate. And he brought some wine. And he drank. And then his father Isaac said. Come here my son and kiss me. So he went to him. And kissed him.

And when Isaac caught the smell of his clothes. This old blind man. He's touched. And taste. And smelled. His senses alert. He blessed him. And said.

Ah the smell of my son. Is like the smell of a field. That the Lord has blessed. May God give you. Heaven's dew. And earth's richness. An abundance of grain. And new wine.

[14:07] May you be fertile. And fruitful. And may nations serve you. And peoples bow down to you. Be Lord over your brothers. And may the sons of your mother. Bow down to you.

And. Echoing God's promises to Abraham. May those who curse you be cursed. And those who bless you. Be blessed. And so Jacob's done it.

He's deceived his father. He's lied and tricked and lied again. And he's grabbed the blessing. God had promised. We're almost there.

Lastly tragically. Esau. Verse 30 onwards. where after Isaac finished blessing him and Jacob had scarcely left his father's presence did they go either side of the curtain his brother Esau came in

from hunting he too prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father and then all keen and expectant I guess he said to him my father please sit up and eat some of my game so that you may give me your blessing Isaac almost can't speak who are you I am your son he answered your firstborn Esau I wonder if in life you ever get so stressed that you start shaking uncontrollably Isaac now seeing in an instant what has happened his plan gone to ruin trembled violently he trembled muchly with muchness and said who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me I ate it just before you came and I blessed him and indeed he will be blessed and Esau screamed he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father bless me me too my father but Isaac said your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing

Isaac said bitterness growing isn't he rightly named Jacob the grabber this is the second time he's taken advantage of me he took my birthright and now he's taken my blessing then he asked haven't you reserved any blessing for me Isaac says no I've made him the family leader he has the blessing of God and Isaac said do you only have one blessing my father and then I think like a whimpering child bless me too my father then Esau wept aloud his father Isaac answered him your dwelling will be away away from the earth's richness away from the dew of heaven above you'll live by the sword you will serve your brother but when you grow restless he will throw his yoke from off your neck and so Esau godless Esau with so little time for the things of God despite his tears he gets nothing gets an anti-blessing and he held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him and he said to himself the days of mourning for my father are near that I will kill my brother [17:27] Jacob I'm going to kill him I will kill him and that's it what do you make of God's chosen family here I think it is so striking that the Bible doesn't try to cover over the rotten reality of what so many of us are like as human beings as families as his chosen people even I haven't got one but you know the um the Google Pixel 7 phone has a magic eraser feature built into it so you take a selfie and then using the magic eraser mode you circle and get rid of the cloud in the sky and the ugly person in the background and maybe I think you can probably do this even the wart on your face and what you're left with on your phone is a lovely perfect picture that you can share on social media to show how wonderful your life and your skin are except it's not real it's a touched up cleaned up fake and Genesis 27 in the Bible unlike every other holy book as far as I can see doesn't use the magic eraser mode doesn't circle and get rid of Isaac's favoritism and secret plan and Rebecca's tiger mum deceptive scheme that will mock her husband doesn't get rid of Jacob's brazen lying and Esau's too late tears after 40 years of not caring about God Genesis 27 doesn't scrub away all that leaving us with a cleaned up fake picture of perfect saints why because this is what God's chosen family is really like warts and all and I think in part through this God wants us to see the truth he wants us to see what a scheming deceiving lying crying family of sinners they are which is very helpful for us because what we see here in this chapter is the rotten unvarnished reality is it not of what even our families can be like sometimes not always all the time as extreme as this for sure I will kill him but we're pretty far from the touched up pictures we like to present on Facebook are we not a lifetime of a parent favoring one child over another in your family and the damage that does or the long-term ugly power struggle for many years with a brother or sister who's different from you and underneath the surface you fight for affection you fight to be top dog or in your family at some point the moment when years of envy and tension blow up and someone screams and shouts and there's plotting and lying and grudge it's not just on the tv it's not just in Genesis 27 this is what we're like truth is this is even what Christian families can be like dad's blinded by love whatever God might have said I want blessing for my godless son a driven yet deceitful mum good things for my child whatever it takes a young man pretending to be something he's not with a veneer of God language coming from his lips to make the lies sound Christian or a grown-up child raised in a Christian home but quietly despising the things of God

reading Genesis seeing something of ourselves reflected back our families we can't pretend that we're perfect saints rather what a scheming deceiving lying crying family of sinners they are and we can be too and yet here's the thing finally here's the surprising thing in Genesis the surprising thing is that all of this and all of what takes place here in this story is in the hands of a stubbornly sovereign good God that is I really want to see us to see this in and through this family in and through this whole wretched drama and mess of deception and lies and tears God's plans don't change and God's purposes stand firm and the Lord God has his way in chapter 25 verse 23 before the twins were even born the Lord had said to Rebecca the elder will serve the younger that is God in his free and sovereign goodness had chosen Jacob to receive his blessing it would be through

Jacob that God takes forward his plan to bless all nations and us today
God's choice his plan his way and so do you see in this chapter despite the plotting and scheming and lying and fighting and even through it God has his way foiling Isaac's plot even using Rebecca's schemes and Jacob's lies and spurning Esau's tears God has his way for at the end of all this this drama the upshot is that Jacob is the blessed one which is exactly as God had planned you see what this family is like and how they are together and all the secrets and sins in the room do not and cannot derail our stubbornly sovereign God which should be such a relief and so good to know and we should say thank God that sometimes despite his people he always has his way because he does because as you read on in Genesis the story goes on Jacob meets God and is changed by God and then from Jacob come 12 sons the nation of Israel and ultimately Jesus our saviour the long promised chosen one who reigns on the throne of his father Jacob and from the time of Jacob through to the coming of Jesus none of the sin and mess of Israel's history could derail that but God's stubborn sovereignty doesn't stop there because as Jesus grew up Herod and Pontius Pilate and the Gentiles and the people of Israel all plotted and schemed together against Jesus and unlike Esau's unfulfilled grudge they did actually kill him God's chosen one and yet even then even through the wicked crucifying of Jesus God had his sovereign way because as the Lord Jesus cried died at the hands of wicked men he bore on his shoulders the sin and the shame and the guilt of crafty old men and scheming mothers and lying and fighting siblings and families like yours and people like you and me as they wickedly killed him Jesus died for us as God had planned he took the curse of God which we deserve upon himself so that now people from all nations whatever they've done and however they've lived can come to Jesus Christ and through faith in him receive the promised blessing of God that we so little deserve we should say thank God for that thank God that despite what Isaac's family were like despite what Pontius Pilate and the Gentiles and the people of Israel were like despite what we are like his purposes to bless our world have never ever been derailed and they will not be today because despite us we the families and people in this room and maybe sometimes even through people like us God will continue to build his church here in Orchard Park and around the world and he will bring blessing to the nations because no one and nothing can stop him no one's plans no one's schemes none of our sins none of our secret failings none of it can stop him building his church and bring blessing to the world so today this morning know that he knows you can't use your magic eraser and show him a picky of yourself that looks touched up he knows us he sees into our hearts he sees our families he knows our family histories he sees our appetites he sees our favouritism he knows the power struggles we're engaged in he knows the grudges that we hold he knows all of that but don't turn away from him in despair come to him because while you and I may be part of scheming deceiving lying crying families of sinners we are in the hands of a stubbornly sovereign God we really are the Lord who holds out blessing to all who will come to him our God who wonderfully will have his way he will let me lead us in a prayer together let's pray the Lord said to Rebecca the elder will serve the younger
[28 : 13] Jacob I have loved our Lord and God we can't we can't hide under goat skins we can't pretend to be someone or something we're not as we see the lives of these Old Testament people we are not far from them you know all the things that we have done you know all our plots and schemes and grudges and long-term family disputes and yet you are still for people like us thank you that you do not wink at sin but rather sent your son to bear upon himself the curse that we deserve that we might freely receive the blessing of eternal life please make us honest and straight with ourselves and with each other and with you please may our church never look like a brushed up perfect bunch of people and we pray and trust that you will act stubbornly and have your sovereign way and you will bring blessing to the world through the son of Abraham the Lord Jesus Christ we pray in Jesus name

Amen Amen Amen