

The Lord's Blessing - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **Genesis 36:1-43** (#526)

Introduction: In a rapidly changing world, where you and I have all kinds of things to think about, seek the Lord for wisdom on, and concern ourselves with, why would I take our valuable time – these precious 30-40 minutes that we only get once per week – to preach through a genealogy? After all, that's what **Genesis 36** is and that's our text this morning. Aren't there more important things we could be talking about? Or, at least, more applicable? I have no doubt that some of you are asking those very questions in your head right now. And I think those are fair questions! So let me give you a few truths before we really dig in – a few reasons why **Genesis 36** is more important than you or I might otherwise think...

First, let me remind you of what our church believes about God's Word – including passages like this one: “We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.” Those are the words that every member here affirms when they are brought into membership. Those are the words that our denomination holds to. Those are the words that I personally believe.

And what those words mean is that every part of the Scriptures – including passages like this one, that don't seem immediately relevant in light of governmental concerns, COVID, our own personal health and work struggles, and relational breakdowns – every part of the Scriptures has been given by God as part of telling us what He wills, what the Lord cares that we should know. We are to believe, obey, and trust what God has said, even when it's hard to understand.

Second, let me also remind you of what we so quickly forget: genealogies in the Bible aren't intended just as curiosities. God hasn't preserved these words simply because there was no ancient version of *ancestry.com*. Instead, as we have seen all throughout Genesis, each genealogy has a purpose. Oftentimes, that purpose is to help us see both the progression of time and also how God's promises are holding

true even through those generations. At other times, like what we'll see this morning, there is another purpose – perhaps less obvious, but no less God-given.

Third, genealogies – or the law, or any place in the Bible that we don't feel especially excited about – send us a clear message that what is most important isn't this new trial, that new fad, or this potential concern. Those are important, they *do* matter to the Lord. But what you and I are called to is a faithfulness that will last beyond whatever trial and trouble is present this day or month or year. The Bible is relevant to your life and mine precisely because it is about eternity, rather than only being helpful for this moment or that situation. Let's care most about what God has said is important and less about what marketing agencies, news broadcasters, and social media says is important. The Lord knows what we need, and He has said that what we need most is to understand and apply His Word. So, let's get to it and see what He has preserved for us as we conclude this part of our Genesis series by delving into **Genesis 36** this morning...

36:1-5 The first thing we need to see in these verses is that Esau matters. If we believe that every human is made in the image of God, then we also need to realize that even those who are outside of God's covenant people still matter. Isn't this one of the greatest problems with humanity, thinking that those we don't agree with are "the enemy"? That our goal is to somehow "defeat them"? Be careful of that sort of thinking – it certainly isn't the attitude Jesus took towards those who didn't yet follow Him. Nor did He or Paul think that way about those who oppressed them. Instead, we need to be praying, caring even for those who oppose us, asking that the Lord would save them – and maybe even use us as part of that!

So it is here with Esau and his family. They are not the chosen descendants of Isaac, they do not receive the covenant promises of people, protection, and land that Jacob and his descendants do. But that doesn't mean we should write them off. Instead, I want you to see that God keeps not just some of His promises, but all of them. Way back in **Genesis 17:20**, the Lord was reminding Abraham that he and Sarah would bear a child who would receive God's promises. Yet, they already had a child: remember that Sarah gave her servant, Hagar, to Abraham and the two of them had a child together: Ishmael. What will his destiny be – even though he is the firstborn – if he won't receive God's promises? The answer is that the Lord

would still bless him. Specifically, God would “make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation.” In these verses and the ones to follow, God is carrying out His promise!

Mark this well: God cares for everyone made in His image. You and I must also. Whether that’s those you disagree with politically, those who are oppressing you, people from foreign nations that you aren’t inclined to think much of. Or, closer to home, that fellow employee that you can’t stand or that relative who talks too much at the family reunion. How are you asking the Lord to change your mind toward these people? Are you asking Jesus to help you love people who aren’t like you? That, of course, is what Christ has first done for us – loving us even when we opposed Him. Follow Him not just in how you love, but also who you extend that love of Christ to. So, first things first: God’s care for all people.

36:6-8 God’s promises, however, don’t end with merely some kind of general blessing. In these verses, we see yet another fulfillment of what the Lord had said. In **Genesis 27:39**, after Jacob had stolen Esau’s blessing, this is what Isaac had to say to Esau: “Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and away from the dew of heaven on high.” Isn’t that exactly what we are reading here? Rather than staying in the Promised Land, Esau ends up moving away. He settles in what will come to be known as Edom, up in the hill country.

From these verses, you and I need to see that there is a blessing given to God’s people specifically. If our first point was to make sure that we don’t discount those who have not yet come to Christ (though we hope and pray that they will!), this second point shows that those who do not trust the Lord may, indeed, enjoy *some* of the overflow of His blessings. Paul writes in **Romans 2** that one of the reasons behind the Lord’s kindness is to bring people to repentance. What Esau and his descendants need is not just a good life, but to trust Jesus. Yet the Lord, out of His grace, will show His care for them even though they don’t deserve it with the goal of wooing them to faith through His unearned mercy.

How does this apply in 2021 to your life and mine? To our city? Or nation? Everyone needs Jesus. There is no person, no culture, no group who is exempt. While non-Christians might well benefit from hanging out with Christian friends or

from living in a town or society that has faithful Christian leadership, simply rubbing shoulders isn't enough to save them. Don't make the mistake of thinking that *some* blessing is enough. The care that the Lord's shows for Ishmael's line – down through Esau and beyond – is not the salvation that He offers to His people. Instead, His kindness is intended to draw all whom He calls to repentance. What about you? Are you here because you trust Jesus as your Savior? Or perhaps you just like being around church-folk? Maybe you grew up in a church, and so this feels like home. Maybe you like our socially conservative values, but the faith part is something you can take or leave. Friend, if that's you, let me be very clear: enjoying the here and now is not enough. It won't save you. Don't deceive yourself into thinking that this is the best that God has to offer. Instead, let His kindness draw you deeper in – look to Jesus as the Savior that you need. Trust Him as your Lord and King. That is how you can enjoy Christ's blessings not only for a time, but forever. And this is what we who believe need to show through our words and actions to a watching world.

God's care for all people, God's care specifically for His people. Third, let's see what becomes of Esau and the nation of Edom...

36:9-30 There are certainly a lot of names here, aren't there? Which should reinforce exactly what the Lord first promised to Ishmael: who could argue against God fulfilling what He's said? The family tree is growing. A note from the Reformation Study Bible was helpful to me here: what we are seeing is God's promise being fulfilled: not only has Ishmael's family been spared, but they are also growing. And not just growing, but turning from a family to a tribe, to – as we'll read in a moment – a nation with kings. So, each part of this genealogy emphasizes that growth and progression, exactly as the Lord said in **Genesis 17**.

But I also want you to notice something: if you were to read Genesis from the start, you'd come across a number of genealogies. In **Genesis 5**, you'd read of Adam's descendants, and there you'd read of God blessing them. In **Genesis 9**, you'd read of Noah's descendants, and you'd read of yet another blessing.

The Book of Genesis ends up following only one of Noah's sons, Shem. His genealogy is what comes next in **Genesis 11**. Yet, there the pattern changes. We

don't read about God's blessing. Instead, that genealogy – somewhat like our present chapter – seems to simply be recording history.

After this point, we see a pattern emerge: when it comes to Terah (Abraham's father), Isaac (Abraham's son), and Jacob (Isaac's son). In each case we read of a specific blessing given by God upon them and their family line. Yet, whenever we are given a genealogy of somebody who doesn't end up inheriting God's promises, who doesn't end up with God's people, we don't read that sort of language. So, with Ishmael and Esau, we instead simply see history, genealogy. (I'm indebted to Matt Champlin for pointing this out in his article in Themelios 42.1)

What's my point? It's that – apart from God – that's really all there is: history, people being born, people passing away. Apart from God, there's no blessing to look forward to, no future hope to believe in or to enjoy. While great nations will end up coming forth from Ishmael and Esau, those nations are “great” only in the sense of earthly power – and then only for a short amount of time. They aren't still great. They'll never be eternally great. So don't miss the contrast between how God cares for those who worship Him and the destiny of those who don't. Which course are you on? One way leads to eternal blessing, the other does not. If you held up a mirror to yourself or watched a video replay of your life, what would be seen? Living for another King and an eternal kingdom? Or simply going through the motions of this life, these generations: countries rising and falling, fortunes changing, companies having their five minutes in the spotlight? Here, you and I must see that true significance comes to those who spend these short years with eternity in mind. Anything else leads to empty history, words on a page – remembered more for their warning rather than for their blessing.

God's care for all people, God's care for His people, and the difference between the two. Let's finish up our time – and this series – with one more point...

36:31-42 We read of one more picture: that of how Esau's family has turned into a powerful nation, the nation of Edom. Yet, that nation will not ultimately receive God's lasting blessing. This is why the very next chapter – **Genesis 37** – continues not with the story of Esau and his family's rise, but instead it returns to the family

of Israel, and to Jacob – Jacob stays in the promised land of Canaan, and that indicates all the difference.

From this, I take one further point: nations rise and fall. No doubt, many in Edom probably thought of themselves as powerful and successful. Yet they did not last. So it is with nations all around the world. The Roman Empire once spanned the Western world, now it doesn't exist. It used to be said that the “sun never sets on the British Empire” due to their colonies found all across the globe, yet all of that changed in only a few short decades. Our own nation isn't promised anything different in the Scriptures. Friends, apart from Christ, everything will fade. As Peter puts it, quoting Isaiah: “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.”

Brothers and sisters, we are only on this earth for a very short time. 50 or 70 or 90 years might seem quite long, but it will be over before you know it. How will you use the time that the Lord has given to you? If you follow the pattern of Esau, you might seem to do and build great things – a wonderful family, a powerful nation. But none of that will last into eternity. Instead, take the family of Israel as your pattern – flawed to the core, yet blessed by the Lord. You and I aren't Jews, we don't live back when they did. Yet, we are blessed to live on this side of the cross. We have the full story of our Savior, revealing in the spotlight everything that we need to know not just for a decent or good life now, but to enjoy the best life of being with our Lord and Savior forever. That starts by trusting Jesus in this life, in the here and now. Have you done that? If not, then why wait any longer?

And it continues by following that Savior as His disciple: asking the Lord for courage and the opportunity to share with friends and family the blessing of Christ and how they can be a part of it. It means displaying to them that amidst the very real trials and temptations of this life, that nevertheless the Rock that is Jesus Christ cannot be moved, and that all who hold firmly to Him shall find themselves secure by the grace of God. Blessing is found nowhere else. Blessing is available to all who call upon the Lord. Let's enjoy Him together, now, as we pray...