

The Ol' Switcheroo

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[0 : 00] You can turn to Hebrews chapter 11. And we are also going to make our way back to Genesis again this morning. This week and one more week in this little series.

We're partway through the book of Hebrews. We're going to get ourselves all the way through the portions that deal with Genesis. And then when we come back and revisit this second half of Hebrews 11, we'll deal with those portions that begin in Exodus.

So this week and then Joseph next week. Sound all right? Okay, Emily, would you please come and serve us? Emily is going to read chapter 11 and verse 21.

Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 21. By faith, Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.

Thank you. When is it easiest to exercise faith? I think it's easiest to exercise faith when life is good, isn't it?

[1 : 13] When you experience God's work in your life in a unique way. Perhaps you pray very specifically and God answers your prayer request very specifically.

Faith is easy when the scripture seems to come alive. And every time you open God's word, it's like he is speaking directly to your heart.

Easy to have faith then. When God's promises remain front of mind. Which I suppose is why it's easier to have faith when we all gather together like this.

It's easy to have faith on Sunday morning, isn't it? When God's promises are front of mind. When we have opportunity to worship together and confess our sins and hear from God's word and sing and lift our voices and celebrate the Lord's easy to have faith on Sunday.

What about tomorrow morning? What's that going to look like in your heart? Faith is difficult when life is hard.

[2 : 23] When you feel all alone. When you feel like you are out of place. When you open God's word and it just seems dry. When it doesn't seem like the Holy Spirit has anything to say to you.

You pray and it's like you are talking to the wall. The Spirit himself perhaps begins to seem absent or at least silent.

And by contrast, isn't it true often in those moments that that's when the devil comes chirping in our ears. Tempting us. Taunting us.

Accusing us. It is hard to have faith in those moments. And yet friends, that is ironically the moment when we most need to have faith in Jesus.

At the end of his life, Jacob exercises faith in a very unique way. A way that is extraordinary such that this is the one moment in his life that the author of Hebrews selects and says, that's what marked Jacob as a man of faith.

[3 : 43] Now, I don't know if you read anything in that verse that sounded terribly compelling to you. But I hope to convince you through God's word this morning that there is something compelling there for us to pay attention to.

Something that marked Jacob as a man of faith right here at the end of his life. Our text says, by faith, Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph.

Here's the problem. We don't even know who Joseph is yet, do we? We have only seen Jacob in chapter 27 get his blessing in disguise.

That's where we're at in Jacob's life. So we have some ground to cover. Let me tell you, time would fail me to tell this whole story of Jacob's life. But I just want to select a few moments so that we get the gist of what the author of Hebrews is poking at.

So in Genesis 28, you can make your way back there. We're going to navigate a little bit here.

We've got some ground to cover. Genesis 28, Jacob receives his blessing in chapter 27.

[4 : 53] And then he is going to leave, remember, because of what he has done. And so in chapter 28, we find something interesting. Whereas the blessing prior in 27 was private and it was in disguise.

Now Isaac realizes what he has done. And so he blesses Jacob again publicly and willingly without any sort of hint of deception.

We see that in Genesis 28. Isaac called Jacob and blessed him. Verse 3, God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you that you may become a company of peoples.

May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham.

Do you see the blessing there? Do you see God's promise? I'm sorry. Descendants, land, blessing. That's God's promise. So Jacob leaves home.

[5 : 57] And that night, in a no-name place, out in the middle of nowhere, an unexpected event occurs. God himself confirms his choice of Jacob.

We read about this down in verse number 10. Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran and there. And he came to a certain place and he stayed there that night because the sun had set.

Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head. This speaks to me this week because I've been having problems with my pillow. So this very much speaks to me.

He takes one of the stones, he put it under his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed. Notice the beholds. Behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth.

Maybe better, a staircase set up on the earth. And the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on this staircase.

[7 : 02] And behold, the Lord, Yahweh, stood above it and said, I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, your father, and the God of Isaac.

The land on which you lie, I will give to you and your offspring. Do you see the promise? Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south.

And in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. He gets all three promises that his father Isaac has given him from God himself.

This is pretty good. This is pretty good. Not only that. Verse 15. Behold, I am with you, and I will keep you wherever you go.

And I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised to you. Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, Surely the Lord, Yahweh, is in this place, and I did not know it.

[8 : 13] And he was afraid and said, How awesome is this place. This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven. What intimate and faith-sustaining assurance.

I am with you. I am with you. What anxiety-calming comfort.

My plans are not thwarted by your past. And in the meantime, even when circumstances are difficult, I will not leave you.

I'm with you now. I am with you. And I'm not going to leave you. My friend, God does not need your scheming or your manipulation, because notice this.

He takes full responsibility for the outcome. I will do what I have promised to do for you. Faith.

[9 : 31] Faith is a declaration of God-dependence. Faith is a declaration of God-dependence. Soon, Jacob meets Rachel. And Rachel is the strikingly beautiful younger daughter of his uncle Laban.

So Jacob works for Laban for seven years for the right to marry Rachel. But the day after the wedding, Jacob discovers that he has been deceived.

He, Jacob, the deceiver, has been deceived. Laban has pulled the old switcheroo on him, and he has married Leah instead of Rachel.

Apparently, it was not custom in that vicinity to marry the younger before the older. How ironic. How ironic. So Jacob agrees to work seven more years for Rachel. Sister wives, what could possibly go wrong, right? What could possibly go wrong here?

[10 : 38] Scripture confirms our suspicions. Chapter 29 and verse 30. 29, 30. So Jacob went into Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah.

And served Laban for another seven years. And when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.

Years pass. And now Jacob has ten sons and one daughter, but Jacob and Rachel have no children together. There is no record that Jacob prayed for his wife like his father had done. But despite Jacob's spiritual neglect, God counts Rachel as a daughter of the covenant. Look down in your Bible, chapter 30 and verse 22.

Then God remembered Rachel. And God listened to her. Apparently, she is praying.

[11:46] And opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, God has taken away my reproach. And she called his name Joseph, saying, may the Lord add to me another son.

As soon as Joseph is born, Jacob makes plans to separate from Laban and to return to the promised land. And Genesis 31 records an interesting, seems to be somewhat private conversation between Jacob and his wives.

That offers a little glimpse into what life with Laban may have been like. It's chapter 31 and verse 4. So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was and said to them, I see that your father does not regard me with favor.

As he did before. But, notice, the God of my father has been with me. Just like God promised. You know that I have served your father with all my strength. And yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. Ten times Laban gave Jacob the old switcheroo on the paycheck.

[13:04] But God did not permit him to harm me. So they leave Laban. And in chapter 32, down in verse 22, we have a very interesting encounter between Jacob and God.

32 verse 22. That same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.

He took them and sent them across the stream and everything else that he had. Notice this, verse 24. And Jacob was left alone.

And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket.

And Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Okay? So Jacob is wrestling with this man. And as they're wrestling, the man realizes that he's not going to be able to pin Jacob.

[14:15] Extraordinarily strong. So the man touches Jacob's hip and puts his hip out of socket. And now Jacob, they're wrestling.

Now, I don't know hardly anything at all about wrestling. But I know it's about pivoting and control and being able to throw your weight around. And suddenly now, Jacob has one leg out of joint, one hip out of joint.

He cannot throw his weight around anymore. He is about to lose this wrestling match. Then, verse 26, he said, The man says, Let me go, for the day has broken.

But Jacob said, I will not let you go unless you bless me. I think the picture is this, that Jacob is holding on to him and refuses to let go of him.

And he's just dragging him around like a dead weight. Because Jacob has no power left in his hip to do anything about it. But he's clinging on to this man with all he has.

[15:22] Verse 28, Then he said, Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and you have prevailed.

Then Jacob asked him, Please tell me your name. But he said, Why is it that you ask my name? And there he blessed him. Jacob is physically broken.

And yet he refuses to yield. He refuses to tap out. He won't call uncle. Right? He won't give up. He's clinging with all his might to this man, and yet he knows he can't beat him.

And so the man changes his name. No longer Jacob. No longer the schemer, the deceiver, the ankle grabber, the overcomer, the overcomer, Israel, the prevailer.

You have striven with God and with men, and he blessed him. Faith is a declaration of God dependence.

[16:41] Jacob doesn't get this blessing, and he doesn't get the new name by scheming, not by deceiving, not by ankle grabbing, but by clinging with all his might, with all that he has left in him, with all of his strength, to this one.

I won't let you go until you bless me. Because Jacob loves Rachel, he favors her son, Joseph, and he treats Joseph like he is the firstborn, and as a result, unsurprisingly, Joseph's older brothers, the whole pack of them, hate him, and they premeditate Joseph's murder.

Cooler heads prevail, I guess you could say, and they end up selling Joseph instead to some traveling merchants who take him to Egypt. Years pass.

Years pass. And God afflicts the world with a severe famine, and now Jacob and his sons, Jacob needs to send his sons down to Egypt to buy grain because the famine is so severe in the promised land.

They have nothing to eat. So he sends his sons to Egypt, and there it is. The old switcheroo again. The little whiny brother who couldn't stop talking about himself and saying how great he was, so you sold him into Egypt, and you thought you would never ever have to see him again.

[18:19] He is now second in command, ruler over all of Egypt. That is a switcheroo that you did not see coming if you were Joseph's brothers.

So in order to care for them during the famine, Joseph moves Jacob and his entire family to Egypt. Chapter 46 and verse 1.

So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba, and he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac, and God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here I am. And then he said, I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation.

I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again. And Joseph's hand shall close your eyes.

[19:30] Chapter 47 and verse 29. And when the time drew near, that Israel, that's Jacob, don't want you to forget, he is now called Israel.

And when the time drew near, that Israel must die. He called his son Joseph and said to him, If now I have found favor in your sight.

This is also an interesting but perhaps subtle switcheroo. The aging, dying father says to his younger son, not his firstborn son, says to his son, If I have found favor in your sight.

Why? Because God has elevated Joseph to this place of prominence in Egypt. If I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal kindly and truly with me.

Do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers. Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place. He answered, Joseph answered, I will do as you have said.

[20:46] And he said, Swear to me. And he swore to him. And then Israel bowed himself on the head of his bed.

Chapter 48. After this, Joseph was told, Behold, your father is ill.

If you're keeping track, this is the first time in the Bible that illness is mentioned. Behold, your father is ill. So he, Joseph, took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

And it was told to Jacob, Your son Joseph has come to you. And Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed.

And Jacob said to Joseph, God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me. He's talking about that night when he saw that staircase.

[21:55] And said to me, Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you. I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.

Look what happens here in verse 5. And now, your two sons who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt are mine.

Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine as Reuben and Simeon are. Notice what happens here. Pay attention to these words in the Bible.

Notice how when Joseph brings in his sons, it is Manasseh and Ephraim. And now when Israel mentions his sons, he has flipped their names.

Ephraim he talks about Ephraim and Manasseh. And he says, they shall be mine as Reuben and Simeon are.

[22:59] And we read in 1 Chronicles chapter 5 that now that thought is escaping me. It's possible that that's 2 Chronicles. I think it's 1 Chronicles chapter 5.

It's possible that that's 2 Chronicles 5. But that doesn't seem right. That what Jacob is about to do here is adopting these 2 sons and giving them firstborn place in his family.

Reuben and Simeon are being set aside. And these 2 sons of Joseph are being adopted by Jacob as his sons. No longer grandsons.

Now his sons. Verse 6. And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours.

They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. As for me, when I came from Paddan to my sorrow, Rachel died. This is a moment of reflection, I think, from Jacob here.

[24 : 00] In the land of Canaan on the way when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath. That is Bethlehem. When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, who are these?

And Joseph said to his father, these are my sons whom God has given me here. And he said, bring them to me, please, that I may bless them. Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age so that he could not see.

So Joseph brought them near him and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, I never expected to see your face.

And behold, God has let me see your offspring also. Then Joseph removed them from his knees and he bowed himself with his face to the earth and Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand.

Now keep in mind what's happening here. Jacob is about to bless these two sons of Joseph and Joseph is bringing them to his father.

[25 : 12] Hold on. He's bringing them to his father and he puts his older son in his left hand and his younger son in his right hand as he brings them so that when Jacob puts his hands on them, he will bless the older son with his right hand and the younger son with his left hand will receive a lesser blessing.

And Israel, verse 14, ready? Stretched out his right hand and laid it on the hand of Ephraim who was the younger and his left hand on the hand of Manasseh crossing his hands for Manasseh was the firstborn.

The author of Genesis just keeps telling us this so we don't miss it. And he blessed Joseph and said, the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys. Parents, you could think of a worse blessing than this to give your children. What a wonderful blessing. And in them let my name be carried on, the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.

Now I think Joseph is caught up in this moment. This is a sacred moment of blessing. And this is kind of like when we're praying and parents and you are praying and you're in the moment and you're before the Lord and then you hear something and you peek open your eye to look at your children to see what has happened.

[27 : 02] And I think Joseph perhaps does this in the moment and realizes what is going on. And he is not okay with this. Verse 17, When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him.

And he took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, Not this way, my father, since this one is the firstborn.

Put your right hand on his head. But his father refused and said, I know, my son.

I know. He also shall become a people and he also shall be great.

Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations.

[28 : 15] So he blessed them that day saying, By you, Israel will pronounce blessings saying, God, make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.

Thus, he put Ephraim before Manasseh. As the younger son, Jacob deceived his father to get the blessing reserved for the older son.

And now, as he is dying, Jacob gives prominence to the younger son of Joseph. Jacob has learned finally that man's way is not God's way.

He now understands that God is not captive to position or privilege or status or rank. No one could ever deserve God's grace.

Grace cannot be earned by good behavior. nor can it be forfeited by failure over a lifetime of ups and downs and deception and being deceived and scheming manipulation and then clinging with all of his might by faith.

[29 : 57] Jacob, Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.

Why is this act of faith so extraordinary? because it's easy to have faith when life is good.

And it's hard to trust God, isn't it? When life is hard. Jacob is not in the promised land. He does not have descendants like dust. Jacob and his family are foreigners in Egypt. They are exiles and Jacob is dying. His circumstances are now almost entirely out of his control. No scheming is going to accomplish anything now.

[31 : 16] But finally, when dying, Jacob's faith is greater than the difficulty of his circumstances.

And his faith is now more catalyzing to his obedience than his desire to be in control. Bowing in worship and blessing Joseph's two sons by giving the younger son prominence is Jacob's declaration of God dependence.

This isn't going to be any more about Jacob. All of his hope, all of his trust is now in the God who does the old switcheroo and Jacob is pleased to participate with that God.

God love I love Jacob's response to Joseph about this switcheroo.

[32 : 25] It's in verse 19. I know my son I know. perhaps your life is not what you thought it would be.

Maybe it feels like everything that can go wrong does go wrong and you have received more lemons than you can possibly turn into lemonade.

As the hymn writer says behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face.

Can you hear your father in heaven this morning saying to you I know my son I know. I know this life is not what you thought it would be.

I know. I know that life doesn't seem fair. I know it's not what you hoped but I will never leave you or forsake you.

[33 : 47] Will you trust him? You say well I'm not doing very well spiritually.

scripture seems dry to me. I don't sense God's presence. Would you please hear your father in heaven saying I know my daughter I know but I am with you and you are mine and I have chosen you and I delight in you I've got you.

Will you hold fast to Jesus? Will you trust him? you say but I carry around so much guilt so much guilt for my sin so much regret about the past so much baggage in my life hear the father in heaven say to you I know my child I know I know you've got baggage I know you've got guilt I know that your sins are many but my mercy is more and Jesus is your righteousness he is your hope and your stay forgiveness is yours because of the death of your savior Jesus there is now no condemnation will you trust him maybe you have been hurt by those who claim the name of

Jesus maybe you have legitimate reason not to trust another Christian again you've been insulted and mistreated and abused can you hear the father in heaven say to you this morning I know my child I know but I will never leave you until I have given you every promise that is yours in Christ Jesus will you trust him maybe you're in a place that you never expected to be Fargo for example maybe you've lost a meaningful relationship maybe you're being ghosted by your friends maybe you've experienced divorce and the devil is chirping in your ear about your weakness and your failure and your sin that led you to this place hear your father in heaven say to you this morning I know my son I know I know my dear daughter I know but I will keep you wherever you go I'll be with you wherever you are I will take you exactly where you need to be will you trust him maybe your life is just really hard and you feel exhausted and you wonder I'm not even sure how I'm going to make it through one more day hear the father in heaven I know my son I know I know my daughter I know but my grace is sufficient for you and my power is made perfect in all of your weakness will you trust him though his circumstances must have seemed unbearable and though he had not yet fully received

[37 : 51] God's promises and though he is a foreigner in a foreign land and though he faced certain death with all the power in the world to do the old switcheroo and send a legion of angels to spare him from death and to rescue him from filthy sinners Jesus committed himself to the father who judges justly can you hear the father say to Jesus I know my son I know but there is no other way to redeem your people there is no other way to welcome your bride into my presence I know my son I know so Jesus makes his declaration of

God dependence not not my will but yours be done and then like Jacob he bows his head in worship and he trusts himself and his family and his future into the hands of God let's pray father we are grateful for your word thank you for these dear truths that we have had the privilege of considering this morning would you please help us as we continue in this time of worship thank you

for the sweetness of your grace for the richness of your mercy for the steadfastness of your love
thank you for knowing us and rescuing us from our sin thank you for bringing us into your family
thank you for all that you have done for us in our savior
Jesus it is in his name that we pray amen