

The Problems in Our Hearts

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 0 0] Well folks, let me invite you to grab a Bible and come with me to Genesis chapter 27, which is where we're going to be this morning. And the Lord has so much to teach us in this section.

Just a heads up, we're going to read it together in about 10 minutes time. I just thought it'd be useful to get a bit of a run up to it so that we kind of know what we're looking out for so that we can see the wood from the trees.

So, there were 3,326 of them when I counted them this week. That is episodes of the Jeremy Kyle show, which aired on British telly between 2005 and 2019.

Now, Jeremy Kyle was a show, if you don't know, that basically got people on to explore, and you could argue exploit, their mess.

Okay, strained relationships, dashed dreams, neighbourhood dramas, and it was watched at its peak by an average of 1 million people, they estimated, in the UK on a daily basis.

[1 : 0 9] Now, here's the thing about shows like that. Meet Jesus in the Gospels, and he'll tell you why they will never be short of guests nor material.

And encounter him in the Gospels, and he'll tell you why, in all honesty, any of us could be on a show like that, and they would have plenty to talk about. And it's all because of where Jesus says the biggest problem facing human beings is.

And it's not primarily the stuff that goes on outside of us. Meet Jesus, and he says that it's the stuff that goes on inside each of our hearts, which runs counter-cultural, doesn't it, in terms of what we are told each day in our world, that the answer is inside of us, and the problems are outside of us.

Jesus says, no, no, no, you've got it all wrong. And one of Jesus' most piercing and his sobering of remarks is that it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks, and human beings think and act.

And that might come at you this morning as a revolutionary idea. And I take it it should, in every single generation and every single culture, that Christ should never fit comfortably into any culture if we've got them right.

[2 : 4 1] I think, though, it is one, if we are honest with ourselves in one way or another, we all know this is kind of true. Do you know there's a French philosopher called Émile Calais, I think I've got that right, who was born in 1894, right?

This guy grows up with zero interest in the Christian faith. He grows up with absolutely no interest in the notion of God. But it was after spending time sitting in the trenches during World War I, makes him stop and ask some pretty big questions of his atheistic worldview.

And I guess that kind of is what happens when you must have seen bullet after bullet and casualty after casualty and friend after friend die. It all made him ask, why, right?

Why do human beings do these kind of things to each other? And he gets back to France after the war is finished and he goes searching for answers and he's reading book after book.

He's talking to person after person on a quest to find it. And he's got nothing. And then one day a friend hands him a Bible and he opens it and he begins to read it and he says of it, he says, at last, this was a book that would understand me.

[3 : 57] So what he says is he opens the Bible. It's a book that understands me. In other words, Calais founded the pages of the Bible, a book that explained him, explained the world.

I must say it was one of my, my testimony coming to the Christian faith, met Jesus, heard him speak, never heard anything like this before. But the map that he's putting out in front of me seems to be what I'm seeing around me and is definitely what I'm seeing inside of me.

Here's a book that explains us. And logically, we'd expect nothing else from the word of our creator. Who made us in his image.

Right. We are like if you go to the Louvre, you pick up a copy of the Mona Lisa. Right. We're like walking little copies of the Mona Lisa that people are meant to look at and think, oh, that's great. But I tell you what, it really wants me to get to know the original.

OK, that's what we're meant to do. We're meant to image God's greatness to the world. But the problem is by nature, by very nature, we've all turned away from our creators.

[5 : 05] What sin is. It's our rebellion against and our defiance of our maker and his ways. And if that's what sin is, then what sin has done is it has curved us in on ourselves.

And so instead of being that image that glorifies God, what we are about is self-seeking. So our loves are disordered.

Our desires are tainted. Our wants are twisted. And here's what I love about Jesus. He doesn't just tell me about my heart problem.

Right. We've all got those friends, haven't we, who love to say after the event, I told you that was going to happen. But Jesus does way more than that. He doesn't just tell me I've got a heart problem. He's come to die for my heart problem.

And in by doing so, he's come to change and transform my heart and free me and free you from the things that naturally grip and have a stranglehold on our hearts.

[6 : 11] But talking of heart problems, here's what we're going to read. Come with me to Genesis 27. We'll start at the end of 26 and we'll work all the way through to the beginning of chapter 28.

This is where we're going to be. This is what we're going to see today. You might remember a few weeks ago we said that Moses, as he writes this, doesn't want his generation of Israelites who are wandering in the desert, nor does he want any of the readers of this book in the years to come to watch this and look at this like a play or a movie.

Remember that? But sitting back, popcorn out, laughing and cringing away, what can only be described as we read it in a minute is absolute car crash telly. No, he wants us to look deep into this like we would a mirror.

And he wants us to ask, do you see your heart? Do you see yourself? And I think the big message of this is that the only hope for human beings is not that we'd get our act together and start playing happy families.

Because that's never going to happen. No, Moses' point is our only hope is that this God would keep his promises.

[7 : 30] And he would send the serpent crusher promised in Genesis 3 who would come and who would defeat the devil, who would defeat our sin and our darkness and would free us from these things.

That's our only hope, that God is true to his promises. So here's what I want you to do as we read this together. And Sarah and Olivia are going to come up. You guys can come up just now. And they're going to read us this for us in a moment in kind of two sections.

Here's what I want you to look for. There's four characters in this section. We've got Isaac. We've got his wife, Rebecca. And then we've got the two boys who are Esau and Jacob.

And all make, you've got that phrase in our culture, a pig's ear of things, okay? They get it completely wrong. Here's the challenge. See if you can count and try and name the problems in the hearts that are arising as we read about these people here.

Okay, folks, I hope you got that. Imagine this family on Jeremy Cowell. Imagine the viewing figures for this episode.

[8 : 44] Imagine these four on a psychologist's couch being told to, how are you feeling? What's going on? You would be there for a long, long time.

The kind of passage I remember first reading this to myself as a new Christian and thinking, are you seriously telling me that this is in the Bible? And it's times at this that we're reminded that the Bible is not first and foremost a moral guide, right?

It's about what God has done to save people from the effects of their sin. What are the problems? Well, here's, let's rattle through them quickly. Isaac.

Isaac is so stubborn that he won't obey, right? Verse 1 of chapter 27. Come with me. Let's explore this guy a bit more. Isaac's getting older.

And he knows that his days are few. Now, remember that God had said to Rebecca in the context of this story, back at verse 23 of chapter 25, that these two boys in the womb, the older shall serve the younger.

[9 : 52] Remember that? The blessing was to pass from the, to the youngest son and through his line. But Jacob, verse 28 of chapter 25, he loved Esau.

Do you remember that implication? He loved him more than his other son, Jacob. Now, why did he love him more? Well, I think you can read between the lines that Jacob's a hunter.

Jacob's got muscles. Jacob's good at catching animals. Jacob's good at cooking. And Isaac loves to eat. Yeah? And that's why he wants one more taste of this stew.

And it's unsurprisingly then, when it comes to officially passing the baton of blessing on, that he is backing Esau.

He wants this line to continue through Esau. Now, custom in this day was to gather the whole family together for the blessing. And I guess that way you know where everyone stands.

[10 : 55] Everybody's heard everything. But do you notice in the text how Isaac's gone ahead and he's arranged a private one-to-one? Do you see that? Because he's so determined that Esau's getting this blessing, not Jacob.

Now, what's his heart problem? He's just really stubborn. I know what God has said, but I'm going to go with my gut on this one.

Subtext, God, I'm pretty sure that I'm smarter than you. I've got to say as we read this, it's a mirror. Do we see that in our own hearts?

I know what you've said, Lord, but I'm backing myself to make a good decision here. As Isaac, what about Rebecca? Rebecca is so bitter that she won't trust.

So verse five, while this little one-to-one is going on, Rebecca is eavesdropping at the door. Right?

[11 : 53] I always remember trying that as a kid, that old cup against the wall trick to try and hear what people were saying in the next room. Still to this day, no idea if that works or not. But Rebecca's having a shot.

You see it? It's what she's doing. She's paranoid. She's listening. She doesn't trust anyone. And how did she get there is the question I think we're meant to ask. Well, not only has she had years and years of living with Isaac's favoritism of Esau, but she's had years and years of living with the hurt of Esau's flagrant disregard for the things of the Lord.

Notice the details we're told in the text. You see it verse 34 of chapter 26. How Esau took Hittite wives.

So Esau knows what God has said about how he's to only marry an Israelite gal so that his heart would not go astray. But he thinks I'm wiser and I prefer it my way.

And he thinks nothing of it as he goes and marries these people outside of Israel. And these women, what do they make life for Isaac and Rebecca? And I take it they're just flaunting the fact that they've got the heart of his son.

[13 : 07] They make her, do you see the word? Bitter. So whatever they're doing, they're ripping her apart inside to the point that she says right at the end of verse 46.

She says, I loathe my life. And you've got to hear the angst in her voice as she says that. Rebecca's really deeply hurt.

And she's carrying wounds around with her. And we've all got hurt wounds in our lives, but I think this is what we need to see from how Rebecca acts here. What the hurt has done as it eats away and burrows itself through her heart is it's birthed in her a deep hardness and a cynicism towards the Lord and his care of her.

You know, Alex, my wife, she spends a long time each night brushing our girls' hair. Right? Daddy's been told so often, I don't get to do their hair.

Okay? The girls, let me do their hair. Alex is brushing their hair. So the jobs at night are, I do brushing of teeth, Alex does brushing of hair. And every night, let me tell you, she gets the far harder job.

[14 : 17] Because we sit there and every single brush, you hear it, ow, ow, ow, ow, why are you doing it? Ow, why are you doing it? And the reason that they're ow-ing is because their hair's got so knotted.

You kind of brush the knots out and it's sore, but it's just knotted everywhere. And that's Rebecca's heart. It's just knotted. It's callous.

Right? She's wearing the religious t-shirt, but deep down she's thinking, I'm wasting my time praying and trusting the Lord. It makes zero difference. Friends, that might be exactly where you are today.

She thinks, I'm taking this into my own hands and she comes up with this scheme, channeling her inner Lady Macbeth, Cruella de Vil, mashed into one to outwit her husband.

And it centers on, and see her manipulation here, it centers on what she knows is the way to her husband's heart, which is through what? His stomach.

[15 : 20] And she'll have planned this in her mind for years and years and years. Rehearsing every move, fine-tuning the conversation, playing it out. So when the moment comes, she takes her opportunity.

And you've got to say, that's what hurt does so often in our lives. We just rehearse conversations. We play out how we're going to speak back to people. I know what my own life is so true. What is her heart problem?

It's bitterness. What about Jacob? Well, he's so weak that he won't challenge. His mum's come up with this plan. And do you notice how he doesn't say, mum, you're a genius.

I would never have thought of that myself. Let's go. What does he say? He says, verse 11, mum, this is never going to work. I might bring a curse on myself. He knows that he's in the wrong, but he doesn't have the courage to say, this is not the right thing to do.

The ends do not justify the means before the Lord. Knowing what the right thing is to do, but being too cowardly to do it, that is how he has so easily been led astray.

[16 : 24] And what happens in this guy's life is that lie that he tells because he's been led astray, what happens to it? It spirals and it spirals and it spirals out of control.

And he finds himself in a hole that he cannot get himself out of. And it resorts just to bare face lying. Right? And time and time again, like a jet pilot, he could have pressed that ejector seat button and boom, he would have got out of there.

But he chooses not to do it. It's so often what we say of politicians, isn't it? Right? Imagine the hypothetical situation. There's a PR manager for the PM who takes a drive to another part of the country to test their eyesight, hypothetically.

And when quizzed on it, they just will not say, I got it wrong. I got it wrong. I'm sorry, I made a mistake. And it just gets further and further and further, deep down into the hole.

And before you know it, everyone's falling out over this lie that could have been sorted like that. The devil will convince us, dear friends, that it's safer to live in the lie.

[17 : 32] It is better to be in the darkness. It is safer to live your life in the hole. But the gospel says that while the consequences for that are real, and hear me right on that, true freedom is to be found by coming into the light and saying, God, I've got it wrong.

I am coming to you and asking for your wisdom and forgiveness and grace. What is his heart problem? His heart problem is fear. It's fear.

I know the right thing to do, but I'm too scared of my mom, too scared of human beings to do the right thing in the sight of the Lord.

And what about Esau? Well, he's so angry that he won't change. When he learns he's been double-crossed, this is like the ultimate version of the hustle, right?

He cries, verse 36. He cries. He's angry. But I think you read the New Testament and it forces us to see that his tears are crocodile tears, not true repentance before the Lord.

[18 : 37] Right? He's way more upset that he's been conned than it is that he's sinned against the Lord. And so hear and feel the ice in those three chilling words you get at verse 41. How did he feel towards his brother?

He hated Jacob. And there's murder in his heart and there's revenge in his mind.

And Rebecca gets Jacob out of there because verse 42, she says, Esau is comforting himself by planning to kill you. Why did she send him away?

Verse 45, what's her hope? That buying time will mean that he will do what? He will forget.

Forget that he was angry against his brother. We've got that phrase in our culture, don't we, that time is a healer? Friends, if you've ever been wronged, you know that that is not the case.

[19 : 41] Yes, it's wise not to hit send quickly on an angry email. Don't hear me wrong. Sometimes it is wise to step back and just cool down. But hear me right in saying that amnesia is never the cure to anger.

And so do you see yourself in the hearts of these people? Imagine these four on Jeremy Kyle. Imagine these four trying to talk out their problems. Pride, deceit, cowardice, lies, anger, doubt.

And what we're going to see in the rest of Genesis is that this stuff, it spreads like wildfire through this family and it causes utter chaos everywhere. This is in the Bible, you better believe that it is. And Moses is saying to this generation who are wandering in the wilderness, our hope is not that we are going to get our hearts act together.

Kidding ourselves into thinking, and we do this every single year, don't we, in January the 1st, thinking this year is going to be different. This year I'm going to turn over our new leaf.

No, our hope is in the Lord and Him alone being faithful to His promise to save His wayward people. To bless the nation, says Moses, not because of who we are, but despite of who we are, to send someone to both deal with and free us from the sin that ravages our hearts.

[21 : 03] And here's what I love as you read the prophets in the Old Testament. One of the things that God says He's going to do for His people, the blessings of the new covenant, what Jesus is going to bring in, is He's going to give them, He's going to give them new hearts.

Hearts that long not to live for themselves. Hearts that long to lovingly obey Him and worship Him.

And that's what Jesus is. And that's what Jesus does. He comes from this line into this mess and He sets His face like flint to go to the cross for all the dross, for all the ugliness that centers in my heart and in my life.

He dies for it. That sin that I should have been paying for before a holy God, Jesus pays His penalty on my behalf and your behalf.

And in so doing, He breaks, and if you picked this up in the first song that we sang, He breaks the power of sin and darkness. He wrestles control from sin that it had on my life.

[22 : 18] He wrestles control and He says, you are mine. I set you free to live and worship me. And here's what I mean by that. He changes us. He's in the business by His Spirit living in us of transforming our hearts to be more like His.

It's what they often say, isn't it, that happens when mothers, they hold their infants close to their chest. The baby's heartbeat begins to match the pace of mums.

I always love that scene in Narnia. Maybe you can think of it this way as well. The place in Narnia. I love C.S. Lewis. You might have picked that up over the years. Lewis writes to the Narnia, it's always winter but never Christmas.

But when Aslan comes on the scene, things begin to melt. And it's the warmth of his breath as he goes around the statues, it's the warmth of his breath that begins to free and bring statues to life.

What is the cure for people like Isaac with hearts who are just full of pride is knowing the forgiveness and the changing power of the effect of the humility of Jesus. What's the cure for deeply hurt hearts like Rebekah's?

[23 : 46] It's knowing the peace of Jesus that transcends all understanding. What's the cure for people who are weak like Isaac is the truth of Jesus.

What is the cure for hearts that are brimming with anger like Esau's? It's the forgiveness and the melting grace of Jesus.

And on that one, let me just do some pastoral and apologetic work on this whole issue of forgiveness because I understand that it's really hard for many of us. I say as Christians, we want to really care about justice.

I think we're called to do that as we read the Bible to really care about justice. But all wrongs being put to right. We really care about justice.

But we should also really care about forgiveness. These should be like two train tracks running right next to each other in our lives. Our culture says it's one or the other. Pick which one you're going for.

[24 : 46] But the Christian says we want to and we can do both. Is forgiveness just brushing things under the carpet? Does it ignore the wrongdoing? Can I suggest that it doesn't?

Forgiveness doesn't undermine it. No, it underlines it. The cross of Jesus says to you that what happened to you is not trivial.

That it was so serious, in fact, that it required the suffering and death of the Son of God to pay for it. It really matters. But we should look at Jesus on the cross and we should almost hear him say, I know what it is to be wronged.

I know what it is to have people who were closest to me betray me. I know what it is to have family think I'm crazy. And it's only because of our belief in the eternal justice of God that one day we can know for certain that he will come back in the person of Jesus and he will have all wrongs righted.

And that's why we can leave it with him. And it's only the grace of Jesus that says it may be a very long and it may be a very painful road.

[26 : 02] But today can be the day as we look to him that we turn and we say, I do not want my life to be dominated by anger and bitterness and hate.

Dear friends, that may be exactly what you need to do off the back of this sermon today. To come to Jesus and say, Lord Jesus, help me with this. So much of my thinking on this has been shaped by two people.

Firstly, by Tim Keller. He's got a great book that he released before he died called Forgiveness. I lent my copy away to someone so I can't get it to you. I don't know what it is, but wonderful book thinking about this whole topic.

And another lady is called Amy Orr Ewing. She gave an address at the National Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast this week down in London. In the audience was a complete mixture of church leaders, parliamentary leaders, and she's speaking about this whole issue of forgiveness.

And she said this, and I think she is bang on the money. She said, I believe the power to forgive and receive forgiveness may just be the greatest power the Christian story can offer our age.

[27 : 16] And into a world that seems to be increasingly divided and just becoming more increasingly polar opposite on things and just throwing rocks at each other rather than lovingly dialoguing with each other.

Do you see how we've got a wonderful opportunity here as the church of Jesus to demonstrate the difference that he makes in our lives? I always love it and you can have this for free.

I was thinking this week, we get, as Jesus works in our lives, I love how Paul in Galatians chapter 5, just to stretch you a bit, he contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit.

Right at the end of chapter 5. And my attention had always gone to the flesh and the Spirit, but actually I was encouraged this week to think about the adjectives, right?

The works and the fruit. Have you ever wondered why he doesn't call them the works of the flesh and the work of the Spirit? He says, the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. In other words, the works of the flesh, these things, are the things that we just work out, just come naturally to us and what comes out of us, that's works.

[28 : 22] But fruit is something that grows and comes out of us as Jesus changes us by his Spirit. Because all glory goes to him and you start reading those words in Galatians chapter 5, the fruit of the Spirit is love and it's joy and it's peace and it's patience and it's kindness and it's gentleness and it's self-control.

And you read those words and you think, I want them in my life. And the only way that it can happen is if the Spirit of God works in us and we produce the fruit to Jesus' glory, that he would come in and he would change my heart because I see this stuff all over my heart all the time and I hate it.

And I take it the very fact that you see it in your life and you hate it is a sign of the Spirit working in you. Now just as we close and can I just tell you about what I've been really struggling with in June?

And lots of you will be in the trenches with me here as we bring Lys to a close. I have been struggling so much with my hay fever.

Anyone else struggling with their hay fever in June? Right? I feel like I'm every night I'm hunting for an antihistamine tablet. I feel like the Met Office website is now in my bookmarks on my phone.

[29 : 44] My nose was like a tap in June. Felt like I was Rudolph walking about everywhere with a red nose. But the question is why? Why was that happening in June?

Right? And the answer is really simply I think that the sun was out. And because the sun was out the flowers began to open.

Yeah? And because the flowers began to open pollen began to spread everywhere. And it only happened because the sun was out. Now think about Genesis 27 the verses that we've taken in today.

Here is the response I think we need to make to this today. Keep that image in your head. Sun hits the flowers flowers open. The only thing that's going to birth this kind of stuff in our lives that's going to help us change is us like the flower looking at the sun and allowing the sun to open us.

That's what the Bible means when it says behold the sun behold the glory of God in other words look at him and as you take him in allow him to transform you into his likeness.

[30 : 59] And so that's what we need to do off the back of this today. Not try harder. Right? Not come up with a swear jar so that every time we get something wrong we chuck something. No, no, no. The application of this is to look to the sun and to live.

In case you're wondering where I've got that imagery from I've nicked it from one of the greatest Christian hymns down the ages. It goes like this joyful, joyful we adore you God of glory Lord of love hearts unfold like flowers before you opening to the sun above melt the clouds of sin and sadness drive the dark of doubt away giver of immortal gladness fill us with the light of day they don't like writing like the old ones now do they?

How incredible is that? Fill us with the light of day that's what we need to do in response to this. We're going to pray and then we're going to spend a little time taking communion together to allow us a bit more time to think about the gospel today and listen if you want to pray about anything that we've talked about there because I realise we covered a lot of ground and I take it one of the reasons that this is here is to say it's okay to come to me as in God with your mess and I care enough this is real life to transform you we'd love to as an elders team or anyone that you've seen here today we'd love to pray and think about that more with you so please do grab us after the service and we'll make that happen but let's pray will we?

Father we thank you so much for this morning we thank you for your word Father thank you that you love us and Father thank you for your commitment to us your people in the person of Jesus and so Father we look to him today our all conquering champion we look to him today as the one who has paid the penalty of our sin on the cross as we're going to remember in just a moment and we look to him as the one who is able to transform our hearts that we would bear more of his image in our lives and so Father by your spirit be moving amongst us this morning be convicting be challenging be comforting as we pray for the glory of Jesus in our lives and in this city we pray in his precious name Amen