

What God Can't Do

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[0 : 00] Okay, well, good morning, everyone. It's lovely to see you today. Always love this time of year. It feels like people come back to our city, people are visiting, students are back, people are moving for jobs.

So lovely to see you here today, particularly if this is your first Sunday with us. You're so, so welcome. Here's what I'd love you to do. I'd love you to grab a Bible and turn to Genesis chapter 35. Genesis, that first book of the Bible, grab your own Bible. Maybe there's ones in the pews round about. Hopefully we've spaced them out well enough that they're always within reach.

Or even on your phone, if you promise me you won't be looking at WhatsApp messages, get Genesis 35 on your phone as well. As you're turning there, two things I just want to highlight. The first one is next Sunday evening. I would love you to come to our church vision evening. We run three of these a year and they're just wonderful chances for us to look back as a church on the past season of church life.

[1 : 04] And just to give God thanks for his faithfulness during that season. And then to look forward as well, just to some of the things that are in the pipeline that we can pray about as a church family.

There's lots of exciting things in the run up to this vision evening that we're going to be thinking about. So please put it in your diary, half past six next Sunday evening.

The second one is just to say, this is another chance where you can sign up to this course that we're running called God's Great Story. Knowing the plot line that makes sense of life.

I've ordered the books for this course that are going to come to us next Sunday for those who've signed up. Really thrilled that there's kind of six or seven folks who've said that would be really interested in this course journeying together.

Just thinking about the Bible story, about some of the key events that happen in that Bible story. And just getting to know our great God better. If that's something you want to get involved in, I'd love to hear from you.

[2 : 04] Grab one of these as you go this morning. The dates and the topics are on the back there. You'll get a free book as well. Just would love to see you come along to this. But Genesis 35, why don't we pray as we turn to this chapter and then we'll get into it as we finish off this series in the life of Jacob.

Father, thank you so much for this morning. I thank you for every single person here. Lord, I recognize that we come this morning from all sorts of different weeks with different things going on in our lives.

Father, we've got different questions. We've got different aspirations, Lord. We've got different feelings as we come here today. But Father, I ask in the words of Psalm 119, that you would enlarge our hearts that we may run and obey your law.

Father, as we gaze at the glory of who you are today. Father, increase our knowledge. Lord, and increase our affection for your son, Jesus, we pray in his worthy name.

Amen. So Genesis 35. Here's what we're going to do. We're going to be thinking about this chapter this morning. But we're finishing a series today that we've been in over the last number of months in the life of Jacob.

[3 : 16] So this morning we're kind of finishing it off, bringing it together. I'm really excited about this. But as you're turning there, let me tell you about two things that happened in my life this week. And how I was really humbly reminded that there's one thing that now connects them.

Here's the two things. Ready for them? Number one, plaiting my girl's hair. And number two, staying up past 11 o'clock. Okay, both things that I cannot do.

And I'm playing fives on Tuesday night next week and at the tender age of 39, running around for an hour. I'm paranoid that there's going to be another one added to that list this week. But we've all got things in our lives, haven't we, that we cannot do. We struggle to do them. We cannot do them. Have a think about those things in your life just now, the things that you just cannot do.

And as you're chewing on that, let me throw you a curveball question to get you thinking today. No matter what you think of the God of the Bible, no matter what has brought you here today, have a think about this question.

[4 : 24] Do you think there's things that God can't do? That's what we're going to be thinking about today. One thing that God says he can't do. That's not so much a statement about his ability.

When he tells us that in his word, it's a promise about his character. And it's wonderful news for our souls today to take in this thing that God says he cannot do.

In fact, I've just finished a book called 12 Things That God Cannot Do. Subheading and how they can help you sleep at night. And it was that second one that made me buy it.

And if you're going to read one thing this year, can I highly recommend, apart from the Bible, that you make it this book. Right? If your time's tight, or maybe you're looking after the pennies, then at least download the free Kindle version, the free Kindle sample on Amazon and take a look at the contents page.

Because the contents page will really blow your mind. Can I give you a few of the chapters? Here they are. God can't learn. Yeah?

[5 : 34] God can't be surprised. God can't change his mind. God can't be lonely.

And here's the last chapter heading. And this is what we're going to be wonderfully thinking about today. And here it is. God cannot deny himself.

God cannot, and let me just add a flavor to it, will not go back on his word.

Right? Some of you might remember, if you're of a generation, the adverts for, and this is a testament to the power of advertising that I can remember this. The adverts for Ron Seal. Yeah? Do you remember Ron Seal? From the UK? What was the slogan with Ron Seal? It does exactly what it says on the tin. Right? Never bought a can of Ron Seal in my life, but I remember that as the slogan.

[6 : 39] It does exactly what it says on the tin. And that's this God. Or if you want to put it positively, when God says that he will do something, you can guarantee that he will do it.

That is the immovable object that's there. It's God's promise. Nothing is going to move it. Nothing's going to undo it. Nothing's going to get in the way of God accomplishing his will.

His promises will not bounce like some kind of expired check. No, his promises are ones that we can take to the bank and we can cash.

And of course, what does Jesus say? The wise man, the wise person does. He built his life on the rock. And what is the rock?

The rock is his words. Because that's a place where we can base our lives. And I think that's what the passage, this passage is designed to convince the first readers of today.

[7 : 38] And it's designed to convince us of today that this God will not go back on his word. The fact alone that Jacob, if you come with me to chapter 35, the very fact that he is still standing in the words of Elton John is proof of it.

The fact, have you ever thought about this today? The fact that you and I have got breath in our lungs today. The very fact that we're here today is proof of this promise.

Because the fact that Jacob is still standing in chapter 35 is nothing to do with the fact that he's able to duck and dive his way through life.

Nothing to do with that. If you think about it, the Bible really should be a three-chapter book. Yeah? Genesis 1 and 2, God creates the world.

He creates Adam and Eve. He creates human beings in his image. The world is declared very good. But Adam and Eve, they desire that tree of knowledge and good and evil, right?

[8 : 53] In the words of Don Carson, what they are doing in that moment is they are trying to de-God God. Right? They are asserting their own authority to be able to assert what is right and what is wrong.

And in that moment, that is when sin enters the world as they believe the serpents lie. And at that point, it should be like a 90s computer game. Those words that came across the screen when you

were defeated by the body, right?

Game over. It should be game over at that point in the story. But God made a promise in Genesis 3:15 that he would send a serpent crusher, someone who would act and by acting would defeat the work of Satan.

And all the effects of that fall as they enter the world. But God promised Abraham, this nobody, that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

He promised them that he would give them a future. He would bring them to a land. And that through his offspring, he would bless the peoples of the world.

[10:12] And again, take that in. And if we are, I don't know what, 120 or so this morning, maybe 100. How many nations are represented here? Proof that God will not deny himself.

But God. See, when you see that phrase in the Bible and it crops up often. But God. What it means is that God has acted. Not because of people's character.

Not because of things that we've done. But God means that he acted out of his character and promises. That's the kind of God we're dealing with as we turn to the pages of the Bible.

Our God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You want to blow your mind about this? Think about this. From eternity past to eternity present, he is the great I am.

He is the one who has always been in this community of love. That's how we know he is love. Because that's what he's been doing. He acted because of his character.

[11:14] In fact, as I heard someone put it recently, the moral of the story in Genesis is that morals do not get you into God's story. Grace does.

This God cannot deny himself. This God will finish what he started.

I've got two really simple points for us this morning then. Here's number one that we can learn from this, I think. As we take in this God of grace, despite our mistakes, grace calls us to move on from what's behind.

Right off the back of that horrendous car crash of a scene that is chapter 34, God speaks to Jacob at verse 1. And if it were me, the first words at verse 1 would have been, Jacob, we're done.

But God says, Jacob, arise. This is the God of grace. This is the God who gets us back on our feet.

[12:31] This is the God of second chances and third chances. This is the God of steadfast love and faithfulness. And this is the God with plans and purposes to bring to fulfillment, to bless the peoples of the world.

He says, come to Bethel. Now, that's the place that we hung out with Jacob when he encountered God back at chapter 28. And here is God saying, I'm going to meet with you again.

And what does Jacob do? See at verse 2, he says to his people, he relays this message and he says to them effectively, we've got to get ourselves ready. Right? Morally speaking.

We've got to cleanse ourselves. And just look at the language that he begins to say to people as he responds to this God of grace. Right? We've got to rid ourselves of the foreign gods that are in our midst.

That's presumably just these little idols that they'd picked up from the nations round about. Or maybe it's even the gods that, if you remember, Rachel brought with her when she fled from Laban's house.

[13:40] Jacob's saying, we've got to get rid of all of these things that are distracting us from devotion to the Lord. We've got to get rid of the rings. And I think this is to their shame that may well have been the plunder that they've taken from the people of the land at the end of chapter 34 there.

So it just gives you a little insight into what's going on in this rogues gallery of people that is Israel at this point. But do you hear the call here? Because he's the God of grace.

He's calling his family to repent of their mistakes. Right? To be honest about their failures.

He's saying, let's let God deal with our shame. Let's make a decisive break from our past. And let's get rid of the stuff that's clogging up our devotion to him.

We've got to get rid of it in our lives. So, you know, let me just tell you how this works out for us today, I think. If your faith is in Jesus today, then I want you to hear me loud and clear that you should never doubt your union with him.

[14:58] Okay? Your life is his. He is yours. All that is his is ours. All that is ours, he took responsibility for and made it his.

The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, lives inside of us. Never doubt your union with Jesus. Bestemming from that union, we are invited to know Jesus, to know the Lord, to experience

his love and faithfulness, to know him, to love him, to learn more of him, to revel in him as we press into knowing him more.

And the thing is, I know this about my life, how often that just gets clogged up by other stuff. Right? We had a guy around last year to the end of the winter to clean out our gutters in our house, the ones that we just didn't have a ladder long enough to get to. And I remember seeing the price for it and thinking to myself, are you charging for that?

But the stuff that he was able to get out of our gutters that were just clogging it up, right? Leaves, dirt, weeds, all of these things were just stopping the water flowing.

[16:20] And I think that's what's going on here. You know, the thing about idolatry is certainly, as Jacob and his family know it here, it's rarely about leaving the Lord behind and going all in with Molech, right?

The God of the Canaanites who they worship. Going all in with the sun gods. Going all in with the God of the rain. It's much more subtle than that. It's worshipping the Lord plus worshipping something or someone else.

Right? Stuff gets in the way, drags us away from him being the centre of our devotion. You know, I read a stat recently that we spend, apparently, we will spend seven and a half hours of our lives watching television.

We're breathing in a version of the good life that our society is telling us that we need to have. I remember my friend Andy openly telling me that he took the Facebook app off his phone because he was just looking at it all the time.

And to do so, he said, my soul was so much better for doing it. The question that comes at us here is, do we, is God calling us to let go of something that is clogging up our love for and devotion to him?

[17:47] And the other side of it is the Lord asking us to take hold of something in order to facilitate that communion with him. It's why Olympic sprinters, when you watch them, they wear really tight fitted vests, don't they?

It's why Olympic swimmers, when you see them do their thing, they're wearing the tightest of caps. They just don't want anything getting in the way. And that's what this is calling us to do today as God's people.

You know, grace says, today is a new day. Grace says, as we respond to this God of grace, he gets us back up on our feet.

And I find it so often as a parent, when I've made mistakes the night before, when I wake up the next day, today's a new day of God's grace. It's a new day. You take ownership for your mistakes. You go towards the kids and you say sorry for raising your voice. Today is a new day because God is like this. You know, listen, just some of you, and just to speak into the season of life that we're in, I know many of you just now are in new seasons of life.

[18:56] Right? You've taken up a new job. You guys are here, your new term at uni. Maybe it's your new time at school. In so many years of the Christian life and just a season of doing life at this church, can I just say that there is never a better time to nail your colors to the mast than at the start of a new season of life.

Monday morning, what is it the question that everybody asks you? What did you do at the weekend? And on Friday, what is the question that people ask you?

What are you doing at the weekend? Friends, we have two opportunities that are right there every week when we do this. You miss the Friday, you get back in on the Monday. You miss the Monday, you get in on the Friday.

Why don't tomorrow when that question comes, we talk about church, and I hope this is true, we talk about church like it was the best thing we did at the weekend.

Just go for it and see how God honors that witness to him. You know, when it comes to Christian growth, I heard a guy called Sam Albury, he was speaking at the Keswick Convention this year, and he was talking about how he's changed his perspective and how he measures progress in the Christian life.

[20:15] And he said, he looks back on his life and he stopped asking himself the question, as I look back on my life now, am I behaving better? Right?

Am I doing more? Am I busier in life? I remember him saying just way too shallow a barometer for measuring growth in the Christian life. And here's what he said, and I found this so profound.

You look back on your life a year ago, here's the question. Is sin more bitter to me now than it was then? And is Jesus more sweeter to me now than he was a year ago?

It's a bit like, and this is his illustration as well, not mine, I thought it was really helpful. It's like orange juice, he said. Okay, everybody loves orange juice, but not everybody loves orange juice after you've brushed your teeth.

Right? But it's the same orange juice, but what has changed? Your palate's changed, hasn't it? Your taste buds have changed. And that's what he's saying.

[21 : 16] Do we look back on life and we say, Jesus is sweeter to me now than he was a year ago. Is sin more, is it more bitter to me now than it was a year ago? That's how we measure growth in the Christian life.

And that's what encountering the God of grace does. He changes us. Right? And it's all of him. It's not of us. It's all of him. He takes out the heart of stone and he puts in the heart of flesh.

And you see when Jacob goes to Bethel, and don't miss that, how God sovereignly protects him and his people from the surrounding nations. God says, remember Jacob, I have given you a new name.

No longer will you be Jacob. Your name will be Israel. And we thought about that a few weeks ago. Jacob, we are by nature. But Israel, we are by grace.

And it's as if God is saying, I want to reiterate to you that promise that I made to you. To be fruitful and multiply. Now, hopefully that reminds us, if you know the Bible story, of the commission that God gave to Adam and Eve right at the start.

[22 : 31] Yeah? Be fruitful and multiply. God says, not only will nations come from you, but now do you see, he's kicked it on a level, kings will come from you.

You see, Jacob's morals are not the thing that keeps this plan on track. And that means that his failings will not derail God's purposes. And that means that despite our mistakes, and we've all got our mistakes, we need to understand that, right?

This is a sinner's only party. Every Sunday. What grace does is it calls us to get up and move on from what's behind. And second thing, and this will be a lot shorter, despite our tears, grace carries us towards what's ahead.

Now, I use the word carries there deliberately, not just because it goes with the sea from before, I promise you. Because this is what the life of faith feels like. As we journey, it feels like it at times. We need to know that nowhere does God promise his people an easy ride. You cannot read about Jesus, you cannot hear from Jesus as you read about him in the Gospels and come away with that conclusion.

[23 : 47] Now, things happen on this journey that can so often shake us and rattle us, but I think this is written here to say, let none of that cause you to doubt God's steadfast love and his commitment to you.

Because this God is never going to let go of you and this God is never going to forfeit his purposes. And I think we get two of them here.

And here's the first one. It's really when people die. And I hope this is just a real word in season for us as a church, given what's been happening over the last number of months.

Let's never doubt God's steadfast love and faithfulness to us. Do you see how we get kind of three deaths in this account? We get Deborah at verse 8. And then we get Rachel.

She is Jacob's wife. The one who he served to win. Do you remember that wonderful description of how he felt towards her? He served, was it seven years?

[24 : 52] But it seemed like a day because of his love for her. Right? Who his heart was captivated with. Hers is an unexpected death.

She gives birth to Benjamin at verse 17. And to see her go through that, I can't imagine how painful that must have been for Jacob to watch. And then we get Isaac, Jacob's dad, at verse 29.

His is an expected death. I guess you could call it that. I was going to say natural death, but there is no such thing if you understand the Bible story. Death is not natural. Death is the great intruder into this world.

That is what Jesus Christ has conquered. He dies, and just take in this little description of him right at the end. NIV, ESV, he died full of days.

And I take it that's a reference to more than just the amount of hours that he managed to clock up in his life, which if you look at his age are significant. It is telling us something about how this man died

full of faith.

[25 : 59] Sprinting right to the end. Right? A guy who knew his fair share of mistakes in his life, but who died full of faith. Let me just say, there's nothing more encouraging than seeing someone through the tears, someone despite the questions, get to their end of their life, and not only are they still going strong, but they cannot wait to go home and be with Jesus.

Full of days. In the words of Billy Graham, someday you will read or hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don't believe a word of it. Love American brashness.

It's great. Don't believe a word of it. I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. And if you think about it, he's bang on the money. But death is a reality for the people of God, for us as we journey home.

But let's not let it rock us. And let's be a community together that helps one another through these things. It's why God has put each other in every one of our lives here.

Don't let death doubt your confidence in his steadfast love for you. And don't let sin do it either.

Right? Reuben, verse 22, he sleeps with his father's mistress.

[27 : 18] I think you can understand that as being like a power play against his dad. That I can take what is yours. Right? As the lion cub challenges the lion, is just somebody making a really bad, angry decision.

And many of us will know that pain in our lives as we watch people make decisions and we just, our heart breaks. of children walking away from the faith of family and friends thinking Jesus isn't for them anymore.

Of just seeing people who were once on fire for Jesus. All of a sudden, they're just cold. Of people denouncing the Jesus who they once loved. Of church leaders caught up in scandals.

All of these things can rock us. But the message here is death and sin. Let none of it doubt your confidence in who the Lord is. None of it is going to derail God's plan.

Do you see how we get the list of Jacob's 12 sons? There. This rogues gallery of people. But what this is doing here is that is acting as something that's telling us that this is proof that God is working out his plan.

[28 : 37] The fact that this family are still standing, that they're still going, is testament to this God who will keep his promises. And centuries later, Jesus will come from this line.

He will be the offspring through whom God will bless the peoples of the world with joy of forgiveness, of joy of newness of life.

There is joy and life to be found in the one that God sent to win the peoples of the nations. He does it through his death on the cross. You know, I was reading with my mate from football, football team the other day, reading Mark's gospel together.

And we talked about that. The fact that that we're still talking about him all these years later. We're not talking about Nero. We're not talking about Caesar. We're not really talking about Aristotle.

Who are we talking about? We're talking about Jesus. This is his plan. This is who he is. He dies, he rises again, and he ascends. And the plan is, his first coming was as a helpless baby.

[29 : 50] But the plan culminates in him returning as a conquering king. As he banishes those who have rejected him to a place of eternal torment.

And we need to understand that that is real. Jesus talks about hell with tears in his eyes. As he deals with sin, as he makes all wrongs right, as he wipes away every single tear, as he ushers in this new heavens and a new earth where there is no more sea, we have to understand in the context there to the first century audience, the sea represents everything chaotic and destructive and evil about the world.

And it's no more. That's the plan. And that is what God can't do. He cannot fail to deliver on his promises.

I want us to be so encouraged as we finish this series by taking in what God says that he can't do and adding to that as a wonderful, glorious flavour to that recipe.

The strength that comes to us today by fueling our souls with the things that Jesus says he will never do. Right? If I ever write a book, I think it will be that one because I love that.

[31 : 15] Okay? Seven, there doesn't need to be seven. All the things that Jesus said that he will not do. He will never turn away anyone who comes to him in faith.

He will never let the gates of hell prevail against the church. He will never leave us as orphans. He will send the Holy Spirit to us. He will never leave us or forsake us.

He makes that promise at the end of Matthew 28. On and on and on we could go. These promises that Jesus says he will never do. And that's where our hope is to be found today. You know, just as we close, I was reminded of this as I was thinking about it this week.

Some of us might have watched the film Chariots of Fire. Right? It's a really old film. That was the best quality image I could get of Chariots of Fire. If you know that film, really it's the story of two sprinters at the 1924 Olympics.

One man is called Eric Liddle. He was a Christian guy. He was asked why he runs. And he said, when I run, I feel God's pleasure.

[32 : 25] Right? As I do the thing that God has made me uniquely good at. I feel his pleasure. I want to honor him and glorify him. There's another man who also ran the race and his name was Harold Abrahams.

Right? And the same question was put to him. Why do you run? Well, running for him was about proving that he mattered. Right? Running gave him, and this is the full quote, it said it gave him ten lonely seconds to justify his whole existence.

Now, as you think about that, what he's saying there, it's true, isn't it? We all have those things, don't we? It's something I think that is so prevalent in the generation that we have today.

People looking for reasons to live. People looking for causes. People looking for careers. People looking to find it in partners, in family, in holidays.

all these kind of things that we can wake up each day and say, what I am doing today because of the grand thing that I'm living for gives me and my life purpose.

[33 : 42] And what I want to say to you today as we finish this series is we need to understand that God doesn't say go out and find that. That thing, that purpose.

No, no. God comes forth in grace to us when we weren't looking for him, when we were his enemies. The gospel says that God has given us a purpose in life. This story that we're in as we understand who Jesus is, as we understand God's heart and his purposes for the world, the gospel gives the Christian believer purpose to every moment of your existence.

And what that means is we draw this to a close. It means that if tomorrow for you as you think about it is going to be a day of changing nappies and battling tiredness because you didn't get any sleep from the night before and you get to the end of the day and you think to yourself what on earth was my life about?

Did it matter? Did it count? You need to know that your life is caught up in his great story of grace. Maybe you're sick and you're unable to get out of bed tomorrow.

Do the things that you used to do. Does my life matter? Friends, your life is caught up with his story of grace. Maybe tomorrow is a day when mental health struggles.

[35 : 09] It's just another day when they never seem to pass. You need to know that your life is caught up in his story of grace. Maybe tomorrow is a day when you go to the lecture hall or you meet friends and none of them want to know about Jesus and you think to yourself what am I doing with my life?

You need to know that your life is caught up in his story of grace. Maybe tomorrow feels like another day at the office and you think to yourself why am I doing this?

What is going on? You need to know that because of his grace God has caught you up in his story and that means as we gather here today think about it. This is the greatest show that's happening on earth right now.

As God's people gather all over the world on the Sunday to celebrate the risen Jesus this is the greatest show in town because this is what God is doing in the world today. As he gathers people from the nations finding life in Jesus Christ all because he is this kind of God who cannot go back on his words.

And let's just finish with these words from Romans chapter 8 right at the end that we get and Paul writes this Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

[36 : 27] Question mark. Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

Question mark. As it is written for your sake we face death all day long. We are considered the sheep to be slaughtered. Would have known that exactly in the first century in Rome.

Paul writes no. In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us for I'm convinced that neither and think about it in the context of everything that we've been thinking about

today I'm convinced that neither death nor life neither angels nor demons neither the present nor the future nor any powers neither height nor depth nor anything else in all of creation as he covers his bases nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord. And that's the promise that he makes us today as we finish this series. Nothing nothing nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Why don't we pray?

And let's just be quiet for a moment just before we close our time together with another time of singing. And dear friends just pour out your heart before the Lord.

[38 : 06] The God who sees the God who knows the God who loves the God who cares and the God who in Christ Jesus is able to offer us forgiveness a newness of life.

And so Father I just pray that wherever we're at today Lord I trust that as you your word has gone forth thank you for that promise that it will never fail to do that which you purpose for it to do.

So Lord I pray that your word this morning as your spirit takes it and applies it deep into our hearts that you would comfort and challenge and rebuke and prompt and nudge and transform.

Thank you Father that we've been thinking about over the last number of months that you are the God of grace. so Father thank you for each other thank you for this time and as we close now Lord be with us help us leave today with a bigger vision of who you are in Jesus' name we pray Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen