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Old Testament

Genesis 25:19-34

Context: Genesis 25:19–34 begins the story of Isaac’s sons, Jacob and Esau, whose struggle from the womb onward will shape not only their family, but the future identities of Israel and Edom.

THE BIRTH AND YOUTH OF ESAU AND JACOB

These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham’s son:

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean.

Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife because she was barren, and the Lord granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived.

The children struggled together within her, and she said, “If it is to be this way, why do I live?”

So, she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her,

*“Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples born of you shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other;
the elder shall serve the younger.”*

When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle, so they named him Esau. Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau’s heel, so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau because he was fond of game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

ESAU SELLS HIS BIRTHRIGHT

Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!” (Therefore, he was called Edom.)

Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.”

Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?”

Jacob said, “Swear to me first.”

So, he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus, Esau despised his birthright.

OVERVIEW

Genesis 25:19–34 introduces the next generation of the covenant family. Abraham has died. Isaac, the promised son, is now the central figure in the story. Yet Isaac and Rebekah face the same problem Abraham and Sarah faced: **the promise of descendants appears threatened by infertility.**

Isaac prays. Rebekah becomes pregnant with twins. But the pregnancy is difficult. The children struggle within her so violently that Rebekah asks: “If it is to be this way, why do I live?”



God responds with an oracle: “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other; the elder shall serve the younger.”

The twins are born. Esau becomes a hunter and Isaac’s favorite. Jacob becomes a quieter man who remains near the tents and is Rebekah’s favorite.

Then comes the famous bowl of stew. Esau returns from the field exhausted and hungry. Jacob offers him food ... but demands Esau’s birthright in exchange. Esau agrees.

The passage ends: “Thus Esau despised his birthright.”

This is often taught as a simple morality tale: **Esau was foolish. Jacob was chosen.** But the story is considerably more complicated. Esau is impulsive and fails to value what he possesses. Jacob recognizes the value of the birthright—but obtains it by exploiting his brother’s vulnerability.

And perhaps most importantly: **God’s promise that the elder would serve the younger did not require Jacob to manipulate Esau.**

That tension will continue through much of Genesis.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

What Comes Immediately Before — Genesis 25:1–18

The chapter begins by finishing the stories of Abraham and Ishmael. **After Sarah’s death, Abraham marries Keturah and has additional children.** This is important because it reminds us that the biblical story is broader than the single genealogical line leading to Israel. Abraham dies at age 175.

Despite their separation earlier in Genesis, **Isaac and Ishmael reunite at Abraham’s burial.** Genesis then records the descendants of Ishmael. God’s promise concerning Ishmael has been fulfilled: Ishmael becomes the father of 12 princes and a great people. Only after completing Ishmael’s genealogy does Genesis turn toward Isaac.

Genesis often concludes the story of one branch of Abraham’s family before returning to the covenant line. The transition is: **Abraham → Isaac → Jacob → the Twelve Tribes of Israel.**

What Comes Immediately After — Genesis 26

Genesis 26 focuses primarily on Isaac. **There is famine in the land.** God repeats the covenant promise given to Abraham. Isaac travels among the Philistines. Like Abraham before him, Isaac fears for his safety and identifies Rebekah as his sister.

Calling Rebekah his sister was not about concealing future offspring. It was Isaac’s attempt to avoid being killed by men who might want his beautiful wife. The episode shows fear overcoming trust and Isaac repeating the same morally questionable strategy used by Abraham.

Again, Genesis emphasizes generational repetition. The son repeats the behavior of the father. **We all may see the parallels to understand this family ...** somebody lies, chooses a favorite child, steals a blessing, or marries the wrong sister.

The chapter also describes disputes over wells. Isaac repeatedly withdraws rather than escalating conflict. Eventually he finds space to live peacefully. Genesis 26 is important because Isaac often disappears between Abraham and Jacob.

But here the covenant promise is explicitly transferred: **Abraham → Isaac → eventually Jacob.**



Broader Narrative Context of Genesis

Genesis answers several foundational biblical questions:

- Where did the world come from?
- Why is humanity alienated from God and one another?
- Why do violence and injustice exist?
- Where did the people of Israel come from?
- How did Israel come to understand itself as a covenant people?

The book can broadly be divided into two sections.

Genesis 1–11: Primeval History

- Creation.
- Adam and Eve.
- Cain and Abel.
- The Flood.
- The Tower of Babel.

Genesis 12–50: Ancestral Narratives

- Abraham.
- Isaac.
- Jacob.
- Joseph.

Genesis 25 marks an important generational transition

- The story of Abraham concludes.
- The story moves through Isaac toward Jacob.
- And Jacob will eventually receive a new name: **Israel**.

His twelve sons will become the symbolic ancestors of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Therefore, Genesis 25 is not merely a story about two brothers. It is an origin story explaining the complicated relationships between Israel and neighboring peoples—especially Edom.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

Israel and Edom

The statement: “Two nations are in your womb” reflects later historical relationships between Israel and Edom. Edom was located southeast of Judah, primarily in the region south of the Dead Sea. Kingdom of Edom was traditionally associated with Esau. Israel was associated with Jacob. The two peoples were neighbors and rivals.

According to the biblical narrative, Edom refused Israel passage through its territory during the Exodus journey (Numbers 20:14–21). Later, during the monarchy, David conquered Edom. Edom later regained independence. Relations remained complicated and frequently hostile.

After Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BCE, biblical writers accused Edom of celebrating and participating in Judah’s suffering. This historical hostility appears especially strongly in the book of Obadiah.



Therefore, the story of Jacob and Esau functions on two levels.

1. **Family story:** Two brothers struggle.
2. **National story:** Two neighboring peoples struggle.

The personal becomes political. And the political is explained through family memory.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

There are two different timelines worth distinguishing.

1. Traditional Biblical Timeline

- Abraham is often traditionally placed around: **2000–1800 BCE**
- Isaac: **approximately 1900–1750 BCE**
- Jacob and Esau: **approximately 1800–1700 BCE**
- Joseph and the migration into Egypt: **approximately 1700–1600 BCE**
- These dates are approximate and based largely on attempts to reconstruct the biblical chronology.

2. Scholarly Dating of the Written Text

- Most modern biblical scholars believe Genesis reached its final literary form much later. Oral traditions and ancestral stories likely circulated for centuries. Written sources developed over long periods.
- The final composition and editing of Genesis probably occurred during the monarchic, exilic, and post-exilic periods: **approximately 1000–400 BCE.**
- This means the Jacob and Esau stories may preserve ancient family traditions while also reflecting later political relationships between Israel and Edom.
- A useful distinction to consider: **The story is set in the ancestral world of the second millennium BCE, but the text was shaped and preserved by communities living many centuries later.**

BIBLE TRANSLATION UNDERSTANDING

- Septuagint — approximately 3rd–2nd centuries BCE. Hebrew scriptures translated into Greek.
- Latin Vulgate — late 4th century CE. Jerome's Latin translation became the dominant Bible of Western Christianity.
- Wycliffe Bible — 14th century. English translation based largely on the Latin Vulgate.
- Tyndale — 16th century. Translated directly from Hebrew and Greek.. His work heavily influenced later English Bibles.
- King James Version — 1611. Produced a highly influential English literary tradition.
- Revised Standard Version — 1952. Used modern textual scholarship.
- New Revised Standard Version — 1989. Greater attention to inclusive language and advances in biblical scholarship.
- NRSVue — 2021. Updated textual evidence, language, and scholarship.



SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

The story of Jacob and Esau can be read metaphorically as a struggle between: **Immediate appetite and long-term purpose.** Esau represents the temptation to sacrifice tomorrow for today.

Jacob represents something more complicated. He understands long-term value. But he is willing to manipulate others to obtain it. Therefore, the story does not simply contrast: Good Jacob vs. Bad Esau.

Instead, it presents two flawed ways of living. Esau fails to value the future. Jacob values the future but tries to control it.

- One brother says: *"I want what I want now."*
- The other says: *"I know what I want later, and I will manipulate circumstances to get it."*

Neither represents mature faith.

The deeper biblical question may be: ***Can we trust God's promises without either abandoning responsibility or trying to control the outcome?***

Modern-Day and Grant County, Indiana Context

This passage fits well in our local context.

Trading Long-Term Value for Immediate Benefit

- Communities frequently face Esau-like decisions.
 - Economic development.
 - Farmland preservation.
 - Housing.
 - Infrastructure.
 - Environmental decisions.
 - Government spending.
 - Church finances.
 - Personal finances.
- The question is often: **What immediate benefit are we receiving—and what might we be giving away?**
 - A community might accept short-term economic benefits without considering long-term costs.
 - Or it might reject change because immediate discomfort prevents consideration of long-term opportunities.

Genesis does not provide easy policy answers. It provides a question: **Are we adequately valuing what future generations will inherit from our decisions?**

The Jacob Problem

But there is another danger. Sometimes leaders believe they know what is best for the future and manipulate people to achieve it. Information is withheld. Fear is exaggerated. Political opponents are demonized. Scripture is selectively quoted.



People are pressured into decisions they do not fully understand.

Jacob reminds us: **A good goal does not automatically justify a bad method.** That applies to politics. Business. Families. Churches. And religion.

Parental Favoritism and Community Division

Isaac loves Esau. Rebekah loves Jacob. The household divides into camps.

We understand camps.

- Republican and Democrat.
- Conservative and liberal.
- Rural and urban.
- Traditional and progressive.
- Native-born and newcomer.

Even churches develop camps.

The danger begins when loyalty to our group becomes more important than truth, fairness, or relationship.

Genesis shows us something remarkably modern: **When families and communities choose sides instead of relationships, division becomes generational.**

HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

1. Value what has lasting importance.

- Relationships.
- Integrity.
- Faith.
- Community.
- Creation.
- Responsibility toward future generations.
- Do not trade lasting value for immediate satisfaction.

2. Recognize when exhaustion affects judgment.

- Esau makes a major decision while physically depleted.
- Hungry people make different decisions.
- Angry people make different decisions.
- Frightened people make different decisions.
- Lonely people make different decisions.
- One spiritual discipline is learning not to make permanent decisions during temporary crises.

3. Do not exploit another person's vulnerability.

- Jacob recognizes Esau's weakness and uses it.
- Jesus repeatedly teaches the opposite.
- The vulnerable are not opportunities.
- They are neighbors.

4. Do not confuse God's purposes with our methods.

- Jacob appears to believe the promise belongs to him.
- But that does not justify manipulation.



- We should be very cautious whenever someone says: “God wants this outcome, therefore whatever we do to achieve it is justified.”

5. Recognize inherited patterns of behavior.

- Families repeat patterns.
- Communities repeat patterns.
- Churches repeat patterns.
- Nations repeat patterns.
- Part of spiritual maturity is recognizing destructive patterns before passing them to another generation.

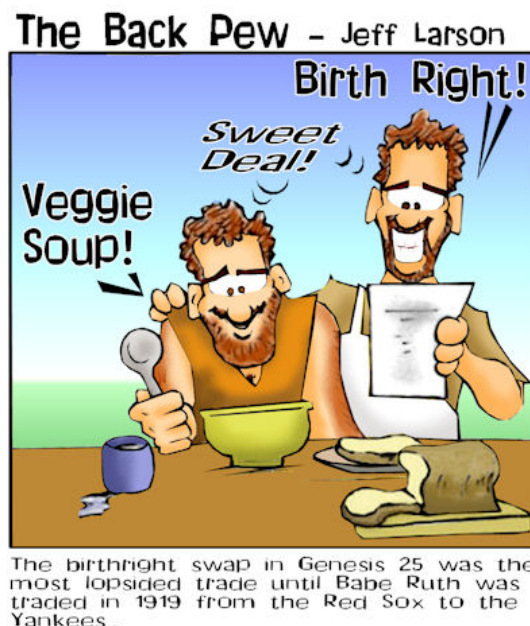
6. Remember that biblical heroes are complicated people.

- Jacob will become Israel.
- But Jacob is not presented as morally perfect.
- God works through deeply flawed people.

The Bible’s willingness to preserve their failures is part of its theological honesty.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *What are some modern examples of people trading something valuable for immediate satisfaction?*
2. *Why do families sometimes repeat destructive behaviors across generations?*
3. *What is the difference between trusting God's promises and trying to control how those promises happen?*
4. *Can a good goal be corrupted by unethical methods?*
5. *What “birthrights” might we undervalue today—things we inherited that we should preserve for future generations?*
6. *How might this story apply to decisions facing communities like Grant County?*
7. *Who is more spiritually dangerous: Esau, who fails to value the future, or Jacob, who values the future but manipulates people to obtain it?*





Gospel

Luke 10:38-42

Context: As Jesus travels toward Jerusalem, he enters the home of Martha and Mary, where a household disagreement becomes a deeper lesson about anxiety, service, listening, and discipleship.

JESUS VISITS MARTHA AND MARY

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus's feet and listened to what he was saying.

But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her, then, to help me."

But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

OVERVIEW

This is the familiar story of **Martha working** and **Mary listening**. Martha welcomes Jesus into her home and becomes burdened by the tasks of hospitality. Mary sits at Jesus's feet, listening to him teach. Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary to help her, but Jesus gently responds that Martha is "worried and distracted by many things," while Mary has chosen "the better part."

This passage is not a simple rebuke of work, service, hospitality, or responsibility. It is a warning about becoming so consumed by necessary things that we lose sight of the central thing: **being present to Christ**. Martha is not bad. Mary is not lazy. The issue is not "work versus worship." The issue is **anxious distraction versus faithful attention**.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Immediately Before: The Good Samaritan

Right before this passage, Jesus tells the parable of the **Good Samaritan** in Luke 10:25–37. That story emphasizes active love: compassion, mercy, and service to a wounded neighbor. The Samaritan does not merely feel sympathy; he acts.

So, Luke places these two stories side by side:

- The Good Samaritan story says: **Do not use religion as an excuse to avoid serving your neighbor.**
- Mary and Martha story says: **Do not use service as an excuse to avoid listening to God.**

Discipleship requires both mercy in action and stillness in the presence of Christ.

Immediately After: Jesus Teaches Prayer

Right after this passage, in Luke 11:1–13, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray.

Mary is sitting and listening. Then Jesus teaches prayer. Luke seems to be showing that the life of faith is not only about doing more; it is about learning how to receive, listen, trust, and pray.



Broader Context in Luke

Luke's Gospel emphasizes:

- Jesus's concern for outsiders, women, the poor, and the overlooked.
- The reversal of social expectations.
- The danger of religious busyness without mercy.
- The journey toward Jerusalem, where Jesus's mission will be fulfilled.

Mary sitting "at the Lord's feet" exhibits the posture of a disciple. In that culture, formal religious learning was usually associated with men. Luke shows Mary not merely as a helper in the background, but as a true disciple of Jesus.

That was especially radical at that time.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

In the first-century Jewish and Greco-Roman world, hospitality was a major social obligation. When a guest entered the home, especially a respected teacher, the household was expected to provide welcome, food, and care.

So, Martha's concern is understandable. She is not fussing over something silly. She is doing what culture expected of her.

But Jesus disrupts the expected roles.

Mary is not in the kitchen space helping with household duties. She is sitting with the teacher, listening as a disciple. Jesus defends her place there. That would have challenged social expectations. Jesus does not shame Martha for serving, but he refuses to send Mary back into the expected role simply because Martha demands it.

There is also a political edge, though subtle. In Roman society, status, roles, household order, and public honor mattered greatly. Jesus's kingdom keeps rearranging those priorities. The "important" person is not necessarily the one managing the room. The faithful person is the one attentive to God.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

Approximate timeframe:

- Jesus's ministry likely occurs around **AD 27–30**.
- Luke's Gospel was likely written around **AD 70–90**.
- This story takes place during Jesus's journey toward Jerusalem, after he has begun teaching more urgently about discipleship, mercy, and the kingdom of God.

In Luke's narrative, this passage is part of Jesus's "travel section," where he is moving toward Jerusalem. That journey is not just geographic. It is theological. Jesus is teaching what it means to follow him on the way.

BIBLE TRANSLATION UNDERSTANDING

Original Language and Dating

Luke was written in **Greek**, the common Greek language of the eastern Roman Empire.

A few important Greek words matter here:



- **“Distracted”** – In Greek, this means being pulled away, dragged around, or over-occupied. Martha is not merely busy; she is inwardly pulled apart.
- **“Worried”** – In Greek, this word suggests anxiety or divided concern. It is the same kind of concern Jesus warns against elsewhere when he says not to be anxious about life.
- **“Many things”** – Jesus says Martha is worried about many things, but only one thing is needed. This does not mean food, service, and hospitality do not matter. It means they must not become ultimate.
- **“The better part”** – Mary has chosen the “better portion.” The word can carry the sense of a share, portion, or inheritance. Mary has chosen something lasting: the presence and teaching of Christ.

English Translation Stages

Major stages of English Bible translation include:

- **Wycliffe Bible** — late 1300s, from Latin.
- **Tyndale New Testament** — 1526, from Greek.
- **King James Version** — 1611.
- **Revised Standard Version** — 1952.
- **New Revised Standard Version** — 1989.
- **NRSVue** — 2021.

A key translation issue is whether Jesus says: “*Only one thing is needed,*” or “*Few things are needed ... or indeed only one.*”

Some ancient manuscripts vary slightly. But the meaning remains similar: Martha is consumed by many concerns, while Mary has centered herself on what matters most.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

This passage speaks powerfully to people who are responsible, dependable, and worn out.

In every church, family, workplace, and community, there are Marthas. They unlock doors, make coffee, mow grass, clean kitchens, organize meals, take care of bulletins, prepare classrooms, pay bills, and notice what needs done before anyone else sees it.

Frankly, without the Marthas, many churches would collapse by Wednesday.

But Jesus’s concern is not that Martha serves. His concern is that her service has become anxious, resentful, and isolating.

Many people here were raised with a strong work ethic: do your job, keep your head down, help your neighbor, don’t complain, and make sure the ham loaf gets to the funeral dinner on time. That is a beautiful tradition. But it can also become spiritually exhausting when people believe their worth depends on always doing more.

Mary represents a different kind of faithfulness. She stops. She listens. She receives. She allows herself to be taught.

In a modern setting, this story asks:

- Are we serving from love, or from anxiety?



- Are we helping because we are called, or because we are afraid everything will fall apart without us?
- Are we so busy keeping the church running that we forget to sit with Christ?

The metaphor is not “Mary good, Martha bad.”

The metaphor is:

- Martha is the anxious self ... trying to manage everything.
- Mary is the attentive self ... learning to trust.

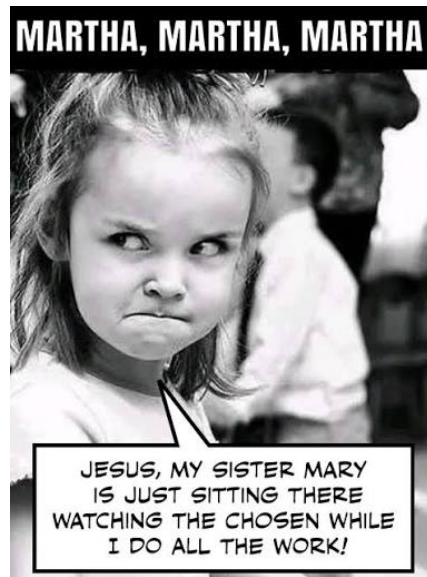
A healthy church needs Martha's hands and Mary's heart.

HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

- We should honor service, but not worship busyness.
- We should notice when good work becomes resentment.
- We should stop using “someone has to do it” (meaning me) as an excuse to never rest, pray, listen, or receive.
- We should defend people who choose learning, prayer, and spiritual growth, even when others think they “should be doing something useful.”
- We should ask whether our churches sometimes reward anxious activity more than faithful presence.
- And we should remember that Jesus does not say, “Martha, stop serving.” He says, in effect, “Martha, do not lose yourself in the serving.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Why do you think Martha was frustrated with Mary?*
2. *Do you think Jesus was criticizing Martha's work, or her anxiety?*
3. *How does this story connect with the Good Samaritan right before it?*
4. *Are churches sometimes better at keeping people busy than helping them listen to Christ?*
5. *Can service become spiritually unhealthy? If so, how?*
6. *How do we balance action and contemplation?*





Addendum

Fear, Punishment, Natural Disasters, and the Anger of Jesus

Our recent discussion raised an important question: **When suffering occurs, should Christians understand it as God punishing people?**

The Bible contains passages describing divine judgment, consequences for sin, and the “fear of the Lord.” We should not ignore those passages. At the same time, Scripture repeatedly warns us against assuming that suffering proves someone has been punished by God.

What Does It Mean to “Fear the Lord”?

In Scripture, the “fear of the Lord” can include genuine fear before the power and holiness of God. But the Hebrew word often translated “fear” also carries the meanings of **awe, reverence, respect, and recognition of God’s authority.**

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10) does not simply mean: **“Be afraid because God might punish you.”**

Most scholars believe it means beginning with the humility of recognizing that **God is God, and we are not.** Healthy fear of God leads toward wisdom, humility, and faithfulness ... not constant terror that God is waiting for us to make a mistake.

Does God Punish People Through Earthquakes, Floods, and Other Disasters?

The Old Testament contains stories in which natural disasters are interpreted as acts of divine judgment. The Flood narrative is the clearest example. But the Bible also challenges the assumption that suffering can automatically be connected to someone’s sin.

- The Book of Job rejects the argument of Job’s friends that his suffering proves he must have done something wrong.
- Ecclesiastes observes that good and bad circumstances do not always correspond neatly with good and bad behavior.

Jesus addresses the question directly.

- In Luke 13:1–5, Jesus discusses people killed by Pilate and 18 people who died when the Tower of Siloam collapsed. Jesus asks whether those victims were worse sinners than other people.
 - His answer is **no.**
- In John 9:1–3, the disciples ask whether a man was born blind because of his own sin or his parents’ sin.
 - Again, Jesus rejects the assumption.

Therefore, as Christians, it appears we should be extremely cautious about declaring that an earthquake, flood, hurricane, disease, or other tragedy is **God punishing particular people.** Jesus himself warns us against making that connection.

What About Free Will?

Much human suffering results from human choices. War, violence, exploitation, poverty, environmental damage, discrimination, and abuse involve human decisions and human systems. God granting humanity freedom means that human actions have real consequences.



But not every tragedy results from someone's free choice.

- Earthquakes happen because the earth has moving tectonic plates.
- Storms occur because of atmospheric processes.
- Bodies experience disease and aging.

Christian faith does not require us to believe that God individually sends every tragedy. Sometimes we simply live in a world governed by natural processes, human freedom, and circumstances beyond our understanding.

The Christian question then becomes less:

- **"Who is God punishing?"**
 - and more:
- **"Where is God in the suffering, and how are we called to respond?"**

But Didn't Jesus Become Angry in the Temple?

Yes. Jesus overturns the tables of the money changers and drives people from the Temple. But we should notice what Jesus does ... and just as important ... ***what he does not do.***

Jesus confronts a religious system that has distorted worship and exploited people. His anger is directed toward injustice, corruption, and the misuse of sacred authority. Yet Jesus does not kill anyone. He does not command his followers to execute the offenders. He does not call down supernatural destruction upon Jerusalem.

Later, when Jesus is arrested and one of his followers uses a sword, Jesus tells him to put it away. Jesus' anger demonstrates that **love and anger are not opposites**. We can become angry because something we love is being harmed.

The important Christian question is: **What does our anger produce?**

Does it produce revenge, cruelty, and destruction? Or does it confront injustice while still seeking restoration?

The Larger Biblical Picture

The Bible contains many voices wrestling with suffering, justice, judgment, mercy, and the character of God. But Christians interpret Scripture through the life and teachings of Jesus.

Jesus repeatedly rejects the idea that suffering automatically proves divine punishment.

- He heals people rather than asking whether they deserve their suffering.
- He forgives sinners.
- He eats with outsiders.
- He teaches love of enemies.

And from the cross, rather than calling for vengeance, Jesus says: "Father, forgive them."

Something Worth Remembering

We may believe that God judges evil. We may believe that actions have consequences. We may believe that God calls humanity to repentance.



But, I believe, we should be extremely cautious about claiming to know **when a particular tragedy is God's punishment, whom God is punishing, or why God allowed a particular person to suffer.**

Jesus repeatedly warns against that certainty.

Perhaps a more faithful response to suffering is not:

- **"What did they do to deserve this?"**
 - but:
- **"Who is hurting, and how can we help?"**

That response fit with Psalm 145 from last week: **"The Lord upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down."**

The God described in Psalm 145 does not invite us to stand over suffering people and explain why they deserve what happened.

God invites us to help lift them up.

Does the Old Testament clearly say God punished people?

Yes. There are biblical texts that interpret events that way. The question is whether Scripture gives us permission to make the same claim about every modern tragedy.

But God is just

Absolutely. But believing God is just is different from believing that we can identify every instance of God's judgment.

Our discussion last week, from my perspective, reached a foundational theological disagreement: **Is God's primary relationship with humanity punitive or restorative?** That's a much bigger conversation than earthquakes, free will, or one incident in the Temple.

Last week's Psalm 145 lesson gives us an unusually good way back into that conversation because the psalm itself answers the question by describing the character of God: **gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, supporting those who fall, and lifting those bent beneath life's burdens.**

The key realization for me: What is God fundamentally like, and how confidently can we claim to know why suffering happens? If Scripture tells us that God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, how should that description affect the way we interpret other passages about God ... and the way we interpret suffering today?

I get stuck in this mantra, too ... are we operating with the familiar shorthand of **"angry OT God versus loving Jesus"**? The Old Testament itself repeatedly complicates that picture—Psalm 145 being a perfect example, along with Jonah, Hosea, Job, Ezekiel, and God's self-description in Exodus 34:6–7.

Maybe it's not that Jesus corrected the Old Testament picture of God," but rather: The Bible itself contains an ongoing conversation about judgment, mercy, suffering, and the character of God .../ and Jesus teaches Christians how to enter that conversation.