

Read: Romans 9:6-16

The Real Hero of the Story

Romans 9:15,16

For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Superhero movies have dominated the box offices for the last few decades. People love heroes and what they can do. They love to see an underdog win the victory. Kids love to put on the capes and masks of their favorite hero and pretend that they are the hero themselves.

What about the story of God's salvation? Who is the hero? Or to put it another way, why are some saved and others not? Today's Bible reading tackles that tough question.

The apostle Paul answers that question by going back in history and telling a story. God chose Jacob, the younger brother, instead of Esau to be a key person in the story. What is surprising is that Jacob was not the respectable one of the two brothers. He fooled his father and stole from his brother. Then he ran away.

Years later, Jacob returned home, but he was afraid that Esau would still hold a grudge against him. How shocked he must have been when "Esau ran to meet him and embraced him; threw his arms around his neck and kissed him." (Genesis 33:4). Esau was the one wronged, but he acted right while Jacob so often was not. Yet Paul reminds us God says, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Wait, what? How could God love Jacob after all of the wrong things he'd done? Isn't that unfair to Esau? When God says hate and love, he's telling you something about himself. But why should God be merciful to Jacob? To you? To anyone? God had to choose which brother would play an important part in his story to save the world. God chose Jacob. Not because Jacob was better, but because God wanted it that way.

It's the story of us. Jacob represents us. God did not choose to love you because somehow you are so much better than everyone else in your family. "It doesn't depend on your effort, but on God's mercy." God despised Jesus on the cross because he wanted to show love to you. And God has had mercy on the whole world through Jesus! While people like to make themselves the hero of the story, Jesus *is* the hero. Yet the way God gives us salvation is by despising that hero to give us, the underserving, his mercy and forgiveness.

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for the Younger Children

- Why do we like to be the hero?
- Who is the hero of today's story?

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- Who did God despise in order to give us mercy?
- How do we know who God has mercy on?

Questions for Middle School and Above

- What does it mean when it says, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."
- Jacob was not the respectable brother. What does it mean for us that he is the child of the promise?

Closing Prayer:

"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1). Thank you for that love and mercy, Lord, that you have given us. I know it's not because of me, but through the work of Jesus and faith in him. Amen.