

The Promised Blessing - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **Genesis 27:1-46** (#516)

Introduction: We have, this morning, one of the great stories of the Old Testament. Not “great” in the sense of there being any hero – truth be told, everyone in this chapter will come out looking pretty bad. And not “great” in the sense of the story being especially well known: while many folks who have had some religious background know *of* Esau and Jacob, few seem to know the details in this particular story. So why do I call this story “great”? Because what we read here draws together several threads that have been prominent throughout Genesis. To get the full impact of what is happening, let me remind you of a couple of them:

In **Genesis 25:23**, we saw the account of the birth of Esau and Isaac. Esau is the older; however, the Lord made clear to Rebekah – their mother – that completely unlike the conventions of the time, Esau would end up serving Jacob, the younger. So far, that hasn’t happened in the story, but whenever God speaks we need to pay careful attention. Watch for those words to start coming true this morning.

Just a few verses later, in **Genesis 25:28**, we read something about Isaac that will play a large role in today’s story: Isaac is a man who thinks with his stomach. He loves the food that Esau brings home to the table, which leads Isaac to favor Esau. On the other hand, Rebekah favors Jacob. This parental favoritism will bring about a major turning point in our verses today.

Lastly, let me remind you of something we saw at the end of **Genesis 26** last week: unlike Abraham’s concern for Isaac, we instead find that Esau – and Jacob – have been left to their own devices for finding a suitable wife. Esau decides to go a very different direction than anything Abraham would have approved of: he marries two Hittite women, which is to say, two women outside of the extended line of Abraham. This marrying of foreigners – and not just one, but two! – brings bitterness to Isaac and Rebekah.

Keep these three facts in the back of your mind, because they’ll help to explain a lot of what we will read of this morning in **Genesis 27**. And as we read, I want you to ask yourself a couple of questions: what do the words and actions of this family tell us about God? What do they tell us about how He operates and who He

blessees? When we see those answers clearly, they will tell us something about His work in and through us as well...

27:1-13 If you are a note-taker, I've broken down this chapter into five chunks, each with a variation on the theme of blessing. Here, we begin with *how to get a blessing*. In the narrative of this chapter, these verses are all about setting the scene. Isaac has grown old and he believes that he will soon pass away. In Bible times, this was the traditional point at which a father would pass on a blessing to his sons, with a double-blessing being offered to the oldest son. This blessing would often include items – flocks, herds, the family lands – but it also included authority. It was, like we see from Elijah to Elisha in **2 Kings 2**, a passing on of the mantle from one person to another.

Yet, remember that Esau was Isaac's favorite. So he summons only the older brother and intends to bless only him. This should send up a warning signal to us: God Himself had said that the older would serve the younger – so why is Isaac trying to circumvent what God had clearly determined? The answer becomes clear in **verse 4**: Isaac cares more about food, more about earthly pleasure, than he does about what God Himself has said. I realize that sounds particularly harsh, but it's an unavoidable conclusion, given the context.

Yet Isaac isn't the only schemer here: his wife Rebekah hears her husband's plans for Esau and decides to intervene. She calls Jacob, tells him what is happening and orders him to bring two young goats from the flock. The plan is that Rebekah will prepare them just as her husband likes and Jacob can bring the meal to Isaac – who is all but blind – thus securing the blessing for himself. A neat, tidy plan. Except for one thing: Esau is apparently a very manly man – quite hairy. Jacob is not, and he points this fact out to his mother. Still though, she has an idea for this as well, and once more tells him to obey her.

Let me underline two points that I think will be helpful before we go on. The first is to remember who Isaac is: he is the recipient of God's promises, first made to Abraham, and now carried on through him. We read of this in the previous chapter, **26:24**. So the inheritance that Isaac will be passing on isn't just land or comfortable living, but is a spiritual one as well: whoever receives the blessing

from Isaac will be the recognized descendant, the chosen recipient, of God's promises not only to Abraham and Isaac, but to whoever will come later as well.

And second: as farfetched as this situation might sound, I'd argue it is a lot more common than you and I think. Don't we sometimes try to "help" God out? Don't we try to change a situation or a decision to be more what we want – or when we want, or how we want – rather than waiting for the Lord's plans to happen as they should? Here, it is Isaac's favoritism for Esau – based on food! – that leads him to try to undermine what God has said. None of this will excuse Rebekah and Jacob's behavior, but we need to first see what Isaac and Esau are attempting to do here, and then to be convicted of the times when we try to change things, too. Be careful that you never try to manipulate God. He is in charge; you and I are not. His timeline is the one that matters – not yours or mine.

Let's see what comes next...

27:14-25 We've now moved from the plan – *how to get a blessing* – to the action: *anything to be blessed*. Just as Rebekah and Jacob planned, the food is prepared and he takes it in to his father. Jacob clearly identifies himself as Esau. Isaac seems suspicious, and Jacob takes the lie even further by speaking of how the Lord enabled him to catch the game and prepare the meal so quickly. Yet, even then, Isaac still senses that something isn't right, so he asks for Jacob to come near so that he can feel him, knowing that one son would be hairy and the other not. The deception ultimately works, though it still seems as if Isaac isn't quite sure. Nevertheless, the father blesses Jacob.

I only want to pause for a moment here to point out something: just because something is recorded in the Bible, doesn't mean that it is commended or approved. You shouldn't walk away from this chapter thinking that it is ok to deceive others, or to recklessly say things about God that aren't true. I know that's the case because of other examples we see in the Scriptures: while David had many admirable qualities, I doubt we'd want our boys to grow up and "be a David" in every respect – there was that whole Bathsheba incident, after all. And what's more, though the words are recorded because they actually happened, we should definitely not misuse Scripture as the devil does when he is tempting Jesus in

Matthew 4. What I'm highlighting here is the danger of turning the Bible only into a moral guide, as if everything it records is for Christians to directly apply. There is always application, of course, but it's often deeper than just a "do this" and "don't do that." The lives recorded here – apart from Christ – are sinful, imperfect, and wavering. In short: not too different from our own. There are life lessons and moral points to be learned, but be careful that you don't follow the sinful patterns that are simply recorded as part of history. Those are intended as warnings to us, rather than examples to follow. So it will be here: while it may seem that Jacob will get away with this, in future chapters we'll find that there is a penalty – one that will haunt him for the rest of his life.

But for now, you and I can only imagine the surprise that must have come across Jacob's face: the plan actually worked!

27:26-29 Isaac's blessing consists of several parts. The first is a material one: in **verse 28**, Isaac's prayer is that the Lord would give to Jacob provision, daily bread, and not just in a meager amount, but in "plenty."

The blessing rapidly moves from earthly riches to earthly power in **verse 29**: the peoples all around are to serve Jacob, even to bow down to him. And, on a more personal level, Jacob will be the ruler over his brothers. Anyone who opposes this state of affairs is to be cursed. Everyone who supports it is to be blessed.

And that is the blessing. On the one hand, it's not much – a few lines of text. But if you think of all that it involves, it means that Isaac is calling upon the Lord to bless Jacob in amazing ways – ways that are consistent with the covenant first made with Abraham. If **chapter 26** was a sure and solid reminder of how God's promises to Abraham would continue with Isaac, then this present chapter carries those promises forward – not through Esau, but through Jacob.

Yet, as you might imagine, such a momentous thing cannot stay hidden for long...

27:30-40 No sooner does Jacob leave than Esau returns, fully expecting to receive his father's blessing. Of course, all it takes is his arrival with the wonderful meal

for the jig to be up – Isaac realizes almost immediately what has happened, but notice this: he doesn't revoke the blessing that he gave to Jacob.

Esau, for his part, is of course upset and angry. He calls for Isaac to somehow bless him, and yet Isaac has little left to give. What he does say basically amounts to: “you're going to have a hard life” (**verse 39**) and “you'll serve your brother... but you may yet break away from him someday” (**verse 40**). Talk about a messed-up family situation! What Jacob and Rebekah carried out was surely wrong in a moral sense, yet Isaac's blessing all but incites Esau to think up a way to kill Jacob.

It wouldn't take much: Esau's view of things is already skewed. He sees Jacob – whose name means “he takes by the heel” or “he cheats” – as somebody who has robbed him of his birthright and now his father's blessing. While the second may seem true, the first is a bit skewed. If you remember back to **Genesis 25**, Esau actually sold his birthright to Jacob – no stealing was involved. And, much like his father, Esau did it for a meal. A more foolish choice couldn't have been made.

Dear church: don't feel too sorry for Esau here – as we'll see in the next chapter, he isn't quite the good son that he seems to want his parents to think he is.

Let's read a bit further and then draw some conclusions...

27:41-46 Esau's hatred of Jacob becomes known. Upon hearing this, Rebekah sends Jacob off. He will go to her brother Laban – who, I might add in a bit of foreshadowing, is just as wily and as much of a trickster as Jacob.

However, in this passage, take careful note of **verse 46**. Just as the previous chapter ended with concerns over marriage, so this one will also. In this case, Rebekah worries over Isaac: she doesn't want him to follow Esau's path of marrying a foreign woman. We'll speak more about this in the future, but notice that even at this point there is a concern for keeping God's people intact. They are to be distinct, different from all the other nations. In time, we'll see some of the reasons for this, many of which relate to worship of the one true God; but for now, it's enough that we would recognize Rebekah's concern as a legitimate one.

Friends: what do we do with all this? Why is Jacob blessed and not Esau? I can give no better answer than the one that Paul gives in **Romans 9:13** “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” Paul is quoting from **Malachi 1** there, but the sense is the same. While we might think “that’s not fair!” we need to remember that God is utterly perfect. He defines righteousness, justice, grace, and mercy. If God chooses to bless Jacob and not Esau, then that is right and good and correct. If we say otherwise, then we are giving in to the temptation of the serpent in the garden, pretending that we can be like God and make decisions just as well – or even better – than He can. Isn’t that what we all do when we disagree with something the Bible says? Or when we try to take matters into our own hands or in our own timing? Resist that temptation! God’s sovereign plans are what is best! And, in this case, we fully know that’s the case, since Jacob ends up being an ancestor of Jesus.

Which brings us to the final point: it is precisely because God is sovereign that Jacob’s story will be such an amazing one. God doesn’t find the most righteous person in the family tree and only bless them – if that were true, then none of us would have any hope! Instead, God blesses broken, sinful, men, women, and children like us. It is only by God’s gracious choice that sinners are forgiven, that broken people like Jacob and like us are blessed, and that Jesus dies not for those who have it all together, but for you and me. God’s sovereign grace through Abraham, Isaac, and now even Jacob gives us hope that His grace in Jesus is for us, too. Let’s enjoy that grace as we close...