

Youth Group Devotionals
Week 8
Genesis 27-29:1-30

A Father's Blessing

We come to a passage where the concept of a father's blessing and its importance is a little outside of our understanding in our culture. Therefore it is important for us to explore what it meant in that time and culture so that we have a better understanding of what is going on. Then we are able to see the things God wants us to see through this passage and see how that applies to us today.

Read Genesis 27:1-29

So let's first answer that question about what is the father's blessing. From Tim Keller's study guide on Genesis, first, we can see in verse 4 when Isaac states "before I die" and verses 28-29 that the blessing is something like a last-will and testament. He is giving the son authority in the family after he dies. Secondly, the Bible regards the father's words as having a genuine power of their own, beyond anything like what we know in a "last will". Thirdly, the Bible seems to expect that the patriarchs would have prophetic foresight on their deathbeds. The blessing thus seems not to be legal action (e.g. "you will rule your brothers") or deep affirmation and ordination (e.g. "*you will live by the sword*") but rather a kind of accurate foretelling.

As we read this story, we see that Jacob and his mother Rebekah are acting in a very deceptive and deceiving way. How can a blessing from Isaac be just given away like that and how does God honor this type of action. This does not make sense at all to modern readers. Since Jacob came so fraudulently, wouldn't the agreement be null and void. This is where we have to come back to God's mercy, grace and sovereignty. We have to understand that the Biblical blessing cannot be reduced to just a legal action nor to just a magical 'word of power' or something of that nature. It is a very complex composite of legal action and deep mental shaping and prophetic insight into the future. Isaac's blessing of Jacob is therefore something that really could not be revoked. It was partially the prophetic insight that he received, and it was partly the deep symbolic affirmation and shaping act. The power of the blessing is real and substantial and comes from God (27:7). It immediately goes into effect. Such a moment cannot be revoked.

It is significant that the New Testament calls us to "*bless*" others (cf. Romans 12:14). This is not using the term in the sentimental way it is often used today. "To be a blessing" usually means our actions bring someone comfort or joy. "To bless" verbally is a ministry to others which has some of the elements of these patriarchal death-bed blessings. To bless means to offer deep insight into what a person needs to be and can be, and then to offer powerful words and gestures affirming and encouraging them to become that.

So take some time and ask are you "blessing" others around you. Who do you think God is putting in your life to bless?

Shafted!

Genesis 27:30-45

Have you ever been in a situation where a friend of yours took something of significant value that you felt rightfully belonged to you? It's happened to me, and I'm sure I've done it to others. What happens in that moment? How do you respond? My response is typically one of bitterness and anger. I hold a grudge thinking I deserve what was mine, and hold it against that individual for a long time. But I'm convinced that this isn't how God wants us to respond.

Read Genesis 27:30-45

If you've been reading with us, you know that Jacob decides to take the acquisition of the blessing and birthright into his own hands. It's interesting that both of those were things God had intended for him, but in his haste to acquire them with his own plan, other people ended up getting hurt. How often do we try to get what God has in store for us by our own means, and people are hurt in the process?

But I digress. Esau is hurt by Jacob's actions. And not just hurt, but enraged. He rightfully should feel shafted. Jacob has tricked him out of both the birthright (the physical inheritance) and the blessing (the spiritual inheritance). Esau is SO mad that he wants to murder Jacob. I think often this is how we respond when we're hurt, especially by those who matter most to us. The wounds are deeper, the hurts sting longer, and the scars seem to be uglier. We often respond out of bitterness and lash out, hoping to hurt as badly as we've been hurt. There's nothing in that response that comes from God. We see that Esau's actions cause huge rifts in the relationship he has with his brother Jacob, forcing him to flee. (Though we shouldn't let Jacob off the hook, since it was his scheming that got him in this mess in the first place)

God is calling us to respond differently than Esau did. He wants us to respond out of love and forgiveness when we're hurt. God is calling us to give up our rights to the things that we deserve, for the sake of others. Esau himself over time learns to forgive Jacob for the things he had done (Genesis 32-33) The question for us today is, which are you? Think of that specific situation where someone has hurt or taken advantage of you. How did you respond? Are you the Jacob who deceives and tries to get what God has in store for you on your own terms? Or are you the Jacob that trusts God with his life later on in Genesis? Are you the Esau who is so enraged when he's taken advantage of that he swears to destroy the people closest to him? Spend some time asking God to help you to forgive those who've hurt you or taken advantage of you.

The Wages of Sin

Read Genesis 27:46-28:9

We live in a time where we choose our future spouses. In those days, however, it was the parents who chose spouses for their children. The reason is not so much that they don't trust their children, but that marriage was not seen as a union of two people (even though it is), but a union of two families. Thus, we should not be surprised that Rebekah finds the Canaanites ("Hittite women") to be unsuitable wives for Jacob. The Canaanites were seen as "outsiders". It'd be like your Chinese parents responding to you if you brought, say, a black significant other home. It's not that they're racist, but they see blacks as "not-Chinese". That is, outside of their culture.

Isaac agreed without much discussion, I presume, and told Jacob to go to Paddan-aram, the homeland of the family's ancestry. Esau, who was not the recipient of Isaac's blessing, realized too that marrying a Canaanite woman was displeasing to his father. But note verse 9: he found a wife from among Ishmael's descendants *besides the wives that he had*. The problem, by the way, was not that he had many wives (it was acceptable back then), but that those wives were Canaanite.

Let's backtrack. What happened was that Esau married a bunch of Canaanite wives - read: "outsiders". At the time, it was important to keep the "bloodline pure" from foreign influences. To do otherwise would be unrighteous. Thus, God continued to insist that the nation of Israel never marry foreigners, because Israel's holiness was at stake. My guess is (and this is not biblically-supported) that Rebekah saw that and worried that her son Jacob would do the same. So, she sent Jacob to find a proper wife.

Esau, on the other hand, noticed that he made a mistake. So he sought to bandage that by adding an acceptable wife to his harem. Unfortunately, that doesn't solve the problem. Even if he killed his Canaanite wives to marry an acceptable wife, the fact was that he did not regard righteousness as important in the first place! Here, Esau has put himself in a situation where he has to reckon with his mistakes for life. He could marry 1,001 acceptable women, but that doesn't relieve him of the guilt from his mistakes.

Let us be careful, therefore, of sin where we will have to reckon with its wages for life. I come from a family where many of my uncles and aunts during their teenage years had no regard for holiness, and had sex with many, many others. The many babies that resulted were all aborted. My mom often said, "Our family will one day be judged because so many abortions occurred because they don't know the importance of making the right decisions." I've heard stories of where teenagers in the same predicament had the courage to carry their babies to term, but it really messed up their schooling, and often the families involved as well. Like Esau, no amount of bandaging can remove their guilt. Although Jesus can remove the guilt, Jesus never promised that he would remove the temporal consequences of those sins. So let us exercise care whenever we make decisions in life.

From Fugitive to Follower

Read Genesis 28:10-22

Up till now Jacob's life has left a lot to be desired. He conned his older brother out of his birthright and stole his dying father's blessing. He's definitely lived up to his name so far- one who deceives. As a result we find him on the run for his life and fleeing the country. He had certainly made a mess of things. Yet instead of finding God's judgment on this estranged son, and fugitive brother, we find his revelation. The purpose? Transformation! Let's take a closer look at some more specific points within the passage:

Place: The story starts off with saying it's a "certain place", yet later we see that the place was in fact a city known as Luz, which gets renamed Bethel later on. *Why is the name of the place not important at first?*

Object: Jacob sleeps on a stone. *Is it just any stone?*

Revelation: A stairway leading from him on earth to God in Heaven, with the angels ascending from where he was (*they were with him*) to where God was, and coming down from God to him. God talks to him and tells him that he is with him like he was with his father and grandfather even though Jacob has felt alone on his journey. *God desires him even in his current state. God is close to him.*

Promise: God reiterates the promise that he originally made to Abraham to Jacob about increasing his descendants, blessing the world through them, and watching over Jacob, and bringing him back to his inheritance. *God promises Jacob the spiritual inheritance of being part of the Chosen people. Something that Jacob does not have to deceive or steal to get, but something that far outlasts a physical inheritance. It will also involve the constant joys and struggles that Jacob has with God for the rest of his life.*

Confession: Jacob recognizes the LORD's presence and work in his life and that even in the most unlikely place God is still at work in amazing ways. *His attitude is changed and he stopped thinking about running away for a moment and stood in awe and reverent fear of God. This is important for us because we may be in the same kind of hurry and bustling in our own lives. When do we take time to stand in awe of God?*

Object: The stone Jacob is sleeping on is none other than the pillar that becomes the altar at Bethel. *This was not any small stone, this was a STONE!!! God also transforms this object into a physical reminder for Jacob of what he has promised. Can you think of any physical reminders God has shown you in your walk with him?*

Place: Jacob renames the city of Luz. He calls it Bethel meaning, "House of God". The place has importance now because of the revelation and the promise. *Our loneliest places can still be the "gate of heaven" by which God reaches out to us. For us believers it is even more so since the Holy Spirit is present with us and we are now part of the House of God.*

Promise: Jacob promises that if God just even watches over him that he will be faithful and give him a tithe of all he has. *His response is one of faith and faith that has a literal response. Do you ever make promises to God because of something He taught you? Did you keep them or is that something you need to pray about?*

Transformation: Jacob goes from being a deceiver, a man on the run in fear of his life, estranged from his family, and alone to a man with a purpose, a promise, and the companionship and protection of God. Jacob becomes a man who inherits, by faith, the spiritual blessing of being the father to the twelve tribes of Israel- God's Chosen People, who are in turn a blessing to the world. *If God can do this for Jacob, then how much more can he do so for us who have been saved in Christ and have the fellowship of the Holy Spirit?*

Pray and ask God to remind you of the lessons he has taught you. Pray also that he would quiet your spirit enough to listen to the things he is teaching you now, and that you would stand in awe of Him.

Devotion

Read Genesis 29:1-30

Have you ever been so devoted and in love with someone that you would do anything for him/her? Well, whether you have or have not, Jacob sure knew a thing or two about being entirely captivated by a woman. Just look at his interactions with Rachel, his future wife. He meets her, and after just a month of interacting with Rachel, he agrees to work for Laban—Rachel's father—for SEVEN YEARS in order to marry Rachel. Before we get blown away by Jacob's mind-blowing decision to work for seven years in order to marry a woman he probably barely knew (okay, they knew each other for a month), let me draw your attention to Jacob's devotion. Just by being willing to work for seven years in order to marry Rachel, Jacob reveals his deep desire to have her as his wife. And when Laban tricks Jacob into marrying Leah, Jacob agrees to work SEVEN MORE YEARS in order to marry Rachel too. Just think about that for a minute. What intense devotion and commitment to Rachel this must have taken.

And then when you stop and think, God loves us with the same—no, even deeper—devotion than Jacob could ever hope for. If our God is so devoted to us...what can we do but devote ourselves BACK to Him? And yet, often we do not devote our lives, just as Jacob did for Rachel, completely for God despite his complete devotion to us.

So how is God asking you to devote your life to Him? What does he want you to sacrifice for Him? How is He revealing to you the joy that comes with devoting yourself completely to Him? Is God convicting you of areas of your life that you are still holding onto, refusing to give to Him? Ask yourself these questions. I also encourage you to talk to your close friends, discipleship group, or accountability partner about what parts of your life God is asking you to devote to Him. How can you be more devoted to God today?