

Twin Boys

Genesis 25:19-34

For the second consecutive generation, the woman who would bear the promised child in the line of God's covenant with Abraham would have to wait years for that child to be born. Sarah was barren, and waited until she was past the age of childbearing before Isaac was conceived. And Isaac's wife Rebekah also had to wait, for she, too, was barren. She waited 20 years. But finally that blessing came to her, the blessing of a pregnancy. It was an answer to their prayers.

v.19-21

But this wasn't a normal pregnancy. There was a strange and unusual complication. There were two babies inside her uterus, twins, and though that isn't that unusual, in this case the two of them were fighting while still in the womb. Talk about sibling rivalry.

It obviously wasn't simply the normal kicking and rapid movements of babies in the womb. This was far more competitive. They were struggling together, as many translations put it. Or jostling, in the NIV, which is a pretty descriptive word. They were wrestling, even fighting. The Hebrew word means to crush or oppress. For babies in the womb, this was pretty violent behavior. And it was a serious problem. Rebekah was understandably concerned, as any of you would be.

v.22

What Rebekah was told when she inquired of the Lord was very dramatic and very revealing. It is an incredibly profound prophecy. Rebekah could scarcely comprehend all the implications of what she was told. But the message from the Lord to her was essentially this--those two babies represented the two

nations into which we can divide all mankind. So the overall focus of this chapter is that,

I. JACOB AND ESAU REPRESENT THE ULTIMATE DIVISION OF MANKIND.

v.23

Two nations. Two peoples. All mankind is consistently divided into these two groups, starting right from the fall of Adam and Eve. In Genesis 3, God speaks to the seed of the serpent and then to the seed of the woman. Two lines of humanity, one which would follow Satan and one which would follow Jesus.

That division continued, with the line of Seth separated from the line Cain. The line of Noah separated out from all the others. The line of Shem, separated from Ham and Japheth. Down to Abraham, not Nahor. And Isaac, not Ishmael.

But this division among mankind is never more definitively announced than with Jacob and Esau. Twins, conceived together in the same womb at the same time. Two nations. Two peoples. This ultimate division of mankind is more fully explained in the NT, when it becomes clear that the distinction is actually between believers and unbelievers.

A. All mankind is divided into unbelievers and unbelievers.

Rom. 9:8 "That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. 9 For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son." 10 And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac 11 (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to

election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), 12 it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.” 13 As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”

We know that this division will be made final when Jesus returns in glory at the final judgment.

Matt. 25:31 “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. 33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...’ 41 “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

There it is. But it is also a division that exists even now.

2Cor. 6:14 “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.” 17 Therefore “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.”

Similarly, 1John 5:10 “He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. 11 And this is the testimony: that God has

given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

Jacob and Esau represent that ultimate division and that ultimate separation. God’s children are those who believe in Jesus Christ, represented by Jacob. Those who are not God’s children are those who have rejected Jesus Christ, represented by Esau.

And don’t miss this—those two groups are at war. And it has been that way since the fall of Adam and Eve.

Gen. 3:14 So the LORD God said to the serpent: “Because you have done this, You are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. 15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

God put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Ultimately, that enmity is between Jesus and Satan, and Jesus, will, of course, win that ultimate battle. For he shall return in triumph. But in the meantime, the war rages on.

B. Unbelievers and believers are engaged in an irreconcilable war.

Jacob and Esau symbolize and represent that warfare.
v.22-23

You shouldn’t let this warfare discourage you, or even surprise you. After all, Jesus said,

John 15:18 “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose

you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. 21 But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me."

Therefore, we read,
1John 3:13 Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you."

As a Christian, the worst thing you can do is to try to end that war by signing a truce. There is no truce. There is no middle ground. There is no compromise possible. The worst thing that you can do is to seek such a compromise with the world, to seek to befriend the world. That is, to accept the values of this world and to love the things of this world. And so we are commanded,

1John 2:15 "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

It is an irreconcilable war. It is a battle to the finish. And as you fight that war in your own life, you can have the assurance that you are on the winning side, for God's promise of the gospel, right from Genesis 3:15, is that though the seed of the serpent would strike the heel of the seed of the woman, though Satan would inflict pain and a grievous wound upon Jesus, which he did on the cross, still God's promise is that Jesus will crush his head.

That's your encouragement as you fight this war. If you believe in Jesus Christ, you are on the winning side. Therefore,

fight harder, fight all the more. Fight the battle against the values of the world which we see so thoroughly represented by Esau. From our first introduction to Esau, we see that,

II. ESAU DEMONSTRATES THE VALUES OF THE WORLD.

Right from birth, the boys had an entirely different appearance. They were obviously not identical twins. Esau was hairy, and so he was given that name, a name which means "hairy." He was a strong, rugged child.

v.24-25

There isn't much there to represent moral values, but there is in the verses that follow, verses that show us just what kind of man Esau really was.

v.27-28

What do we learn about Esau? He became a skillful hunter, which implies an interest in killing for the sport of it. When he is described as a skillful hunter, we could more accurately, perhaps, describe that as cunning. Clever. He was good at killing, when it seems with his family wealth of cattle, there was little need for killing animals for food.

He lived in the open fields. He was rugged, and evidently restless and unsettled. He loved excitement, activity, change and freedom, exchanging the value of a stable home for the thrill of the open country. The implication suggests a lack of discipline and a lack of maturity.

But the description I have chosen to sum all of that up with regard to Esau is the idea of self-sufficiency. Worldly self-sufficiency.

A. Esau demonstrates the danger of worldly self-sufficiency.

Anything that came along he would handle himself. On his own. In his own strength. That what seems to be presented to us. We might call that today, pride. I could even say more specifically, male pride. The desire to be able to depend upon your own strength for everything. That really is pride. And the biblical evaluation of Esau found in Hebrews 12:16 is that he was a godless man, profane.

He was an empty man, for in his proud self-satisfaction, it becomes obvious that his primary goal in life was his own selfish satisfaction. Worldly satisfaction, that is, the enjoyment of the things of this world.

B. Esau demonstrates the emptiness of living for worldly satisfaction.

Notice his value system, particularly how empty and meaningless it is.

v.29-30

He was hungry. So much so that he was simply rude. His actual words were something like this, “I’m starving, give me some of that red stuff, that red stuff.” He didn’t even care what it was. He didn’t ask politely, nor with any sense of appreciation for Jacob’s preparation of the food. Just, “Give me some of that.”

We teach our children to say “please,” for good reason. We teach them to ask for things respectfully and politely. Sadly, Esau never learned such manners. His only concern was his own belly. It gets worse.

v.31

We’ll evaluate that request in a minute, but for now, look at how Esau responded,

v.32

What horrible, empty, vain, selfish values. “I’m so hungry I’m about to die. Who cares about a birthright?” In his hunger, his selfishness shines forth brightly. The emptiness of worldly satisfaction. Esau went no deeper than the philosophy of life expressed in,

Isa. 22:13 “But instead, joy and gladness, Slaying oxen and killing sheep, Eating meat and drinking wine: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!”

My friends, some things are more important than food. Some things are more important than physical desires and physical pleasures. Esau missed that all. And so we read,

v.33-34

He got his dinner, didn’t he? And lost his inheritance! And so the exhortation of,

Heb.12:16 “...lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.”

The emptiness of his values are astounding, yet they are easy to understand, for almost every day, in some way or another, each one of you is likely to be tempted to accept the values of Esau. To consider worldly pleasure or selfish satisfaction to be more important than serving God.

Jesus warns us of that temptation,

Matt. 6:24 “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. 25 “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put

on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

That is to be your highest priority in life. Seek first his kingdom. And his righteousness. God promises that all these other things, these worldly things, these physical things, like clothes and food and houses, God promises that He will take care of all those things. You, however, you seek after godliness. You seek after his kingdom.

And so we read in Mark 8:34 that,
Mark 8:34 “When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 35 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. 36 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? 37 Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

“What can a man give in exchange for his soul?” For Esau, it was just a bowl of stew.

Living for world satisfaction is empty, for I can assure, not many hours after Esau ate that bowl of stew, he was again hungry. But never again could he regain his birthright, which he had so foolishly sold in order to feed his stomach. Never are the words Paul would write in Philippians 3 more appropriate.

Phil. 3:18 “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.”

On the contrary, however, as he rights in the very next verse, Phil.3:20 “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

What, then, does Jacob demonstrate for us? You might think that since Esau demonstrates the values of the world, that Jacob would demonstrate the values of godliness. But he doesn’t. If anything, just the opposite. Evaluating Jacob actions here is actually a little difficult, because God doesn’t evaluate them. God doesn’t say whether what he did was right or wrong. Therefore, many commentators really make Jacob out to look like a saint in all of this. Whatever immaturity and selfishness Esau portrayed, Jacob, they say demonstrated maturity and godliness.

But I believe that is mistaken. I don’t find much in what Jacob did to be praiseworthy. He’s more like a conniving, deceitful,

treacherous spoiled little kid who is used to getting whatever he wants. So why doesn't Scripture rebuke him or criticize his actions? Because the whole point of Jacob's example is to demonstrate the nature of grace, God's grace.

What is clear from this chapter, and from chapter 27, is that,

III. JACOB PROVES THE GRACIOUSNESS OF GOD'S LOVE.

The whole point of Jacob's example is to prove that God's love was not bestowed upon him because of anything in him.

A. Jacob's character proves that God's love is not based upon anything in man.

That's the meaning of grace. God isn't rewarding Jacob because he was so righteous and godly. Instead, he blesses him despite his sinfulness. Look at Jacob's actions more closely.

v.22

The babies were fighting. From the description of verse 26, it would appear that they were fighting for position, and Jacob, from the womb, is seeking to overtake Esau.

v.26

The sense is that Jacob is trying to pull Esau back in so that he can get out first. Such sinful rivalry and jealousy. Again, from the womb. It is certainly obvious that neither of these boys was born in innocence!

Jacob's own name would reflect this aspect of his character. In Hebrew, "Jacob" means to grasp or to seize. It has the idea of being at someone's heels, like an army in rapid pursuit of an enemy. The word does have that hostile sense, of dogging the steps of someone else in order to overcome them or supplant

them. It even became a synonym for treachery and deceitfulness.

So Jacob was a treacherous schemer, trying to outdo his older brother, from the womb! And what he accomplished by selling Esau that bowl of stew was what he was trying to accomplish coming out of the womb! To overtake his brother.

The description here offers a great contrast between the two boys, and one which certainly implies jealousy on Jacob's part.

v.27

That jealousy was stimulated by the foolishness of their parents showing favoritism.

v.28

His offer to Esau was not praiseworthy!

v.29-34

That was his brother! Whatever rudeness Esau may have showed, however ungrateful or selfish he might have been, Jacob still should have been eager to share his food with him. They were a family. But instead, Jacob took advantage of his brother's foolishness, and got what he had always wanted. The birthright.

Now, the birthright would later be defined as a double portion of the inheritance, as well as a kind of supremacy over one's brethren and his father's house. That is precisely what Jacob had been fighting with Esau about from the womb! That is precisely what he had been attempting to obtain when they were both born.

So what's the point of all this? The graciousness of God's love. The grace of God, as the foundation upon which God chooses to save us.

Eph. 2:8 "For by grace you have been saved through faith,

and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Titus 3:4 “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us...7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

God’s blessing came to Jacob, and Jacob would come to represent all those who are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, because God is a god of grace.

There was nothing in Jacob that moved God to bless him. And, similarly, there as nothing in us to move God to save us. “... not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.”

I can’t stress these things enough. But go back to verse 23, and note again how all of this was actually prophesied by God.
v.23

What was the basis of that separation between Jacob and Esau? Why did God choose Jacob and not Esau?

Scripture gives us a very definitive and profound answer.

B. Jacob’s blessing proves that God’s love is based entirely upon his sovereign choice.

God’s sovereign choice is announced in,
v.23

That is clearly explained and applied in,
Rom. 9:10 “And not only this, but when Rebecca also had

conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac 11 (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), 12 it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.” 13 As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”

Paul then, immediately answers the expected question of fairness. “That’s not fair,” people will say. So Paul answers,

Rom.9:14 “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15 For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.” 16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.”

So, ultimately, salvation does not depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. That’s the message of Jacob and Esau. When her twin boys wrestled in her own womb, Rebekah was told that “the older shall serve the younger.” And, as Scripture explains, that was so “that the purpose of God according to election might stand.”

God’s purpose in election. That’s the message of Jacob and Esau. It is a message which is so clearly defined by,

Eph.1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved...11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.”

Those words are such stumbling blocks to many people, but they shouldn't be. The doctrine of election shouldn't be a stumbling block, nor certainly not something which divides God's people. Rather, these words and this example should make you realize that God saved you because he loved you, not because of what you have done. And because he saved you because he loved you, you can be assured that he will never stop loving you.

Let the doctrine of election and predestination stir you to praise, for we are just like Jacob. Our lives, and especially our sins, prove the graciousness of God's love. Therefore, praise him. Worship him. As those verses I just read in Ephesians 1 began,

Eph. 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."

Chief among those spiritual blessings is the exercise of God's grace. His grace in choosing to love us, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace."

Eph. 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."