

Isaac's Blessing

Genesis 27:1-29

At the end of the book of Genesis, when Joseph encounters his brothers after their father Jacob's death, they were fearful of Joseph because they knew that they had done him such horrible evil. But Joseph's response was so gracious.

Gen. 50:19 Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."

Joseph understood that God was sovereign in bringing about his purpose, even when he used the sinfulness of men to do it. "You meant evil against me, {but} God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result." Never is that same idea shown more clearly than with reference to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In Peter's words,

Acts 4:27 "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done."

So God uses the sinful acts of men to bring about his own predetermined purpose, what, "Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done." That is exactly what's happening in our text this morning. In this account, nobody looks particularly good. Actually, all four people look bad. Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Esau. And despite that, God still accomplishes his purposes.

It's really quite amazing. Everyone involved in this drama is ignoring God, but still everything happens "according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of

His will."

Let's begin with Isaac.

I. ISAAC ATTEMPTED TO THWART GOD'S PURPOSES.

How? How does Isaac attempt to thwart God's purposes? By choosing Esau to receive his blessing.

Now, you have to understand why this blessing was so significant. It would carry great legal weight, as a legitimate last will and testament. The law recognized the authority of a death-bed blessing. And also, since it was coming from the patriarch, it would be prophetic. That is, Isaac's blessing would come in the form of a prophecy. There would be the presumption by the people of that Isaac's blessing would be inspired prophecy.

But, of course, Isaac's intentions were to thwart God's will by granting Esau his blessing instead of Jacob.

v.1-4

A. That blessing of Esau would contradict God's prophetic revelation.

Remember what the Lord has already revealed,

Gen. 25:21 "Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. 22 But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If all is well, why am I like this?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. 23 And the LORD said to her: "Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger."

That was God's revealed will. That was God's revealed purpose. Esau would serve Jacob. Jacob would be the chosen

line of God's covenant people, and Esau would not. And in our text this morning Isaac intended to directly contradict that revelation. He intended to disregard it, and to reverse the order which God had decreed. He would bless Esau.

Surely, we have no reason to believe that he didn't know of that revelation from God. Surely, we can't believe that he just forgot what God had said. How he could excuse it is his own mind, I can only imagine. But the truth is that the blessing which he believed he was giving to Esau would have reversed what God had said.

Why? Why did Isaac attempt to thwart God's purposes? Why would he even consider such a thing, let alone carry through with it? Why? The only reference we have here is food. His own physical desires. So it would seem that,

B. The blessing of Esau was based on physical desires not spiritual concerns.

Isaac loved the food which Esau prepared, and therefore Esau had always been his favored son. We learned that in,

Gen.25:28 "And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob."

So now we read in,
v.2-4

Isaac was ruled by his appetite, his love for food. He would make this decision to bless Esau based upon that physical desire. This from a godly man, though there is nothing praiseworthy in what he does here! Such a willingness to be ruled by your physical appetite may be a temptation that many Christians face, but far worse, a slavery to physical appetites is a description of unbelievers. Paul writes about such unbelievers in,

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."

How shameful when those words describing non-Christians actually apply to a particular situation in the life of a Christian. But they often do. Often, as Christians, we imitate Isaac here, acting in accord with our physical appetites instead of in obedience to God's word. So Paul exhorts the church at Corinth,

1Cor. 6:12 "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. 13 Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."

Being controlled by desires for food and being controlled by sexual desires are put into the same category. The point is that the body, your body, with all of its physical desires, actually belongs to God. So Paul continues,

1Cor. 6:19 "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body."

Honor God with your body, by controlling your physical desires. Paul would give us his own example,

1 Cor.9:27 "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."

That is where Isaac failed in this instance, basing his decision upon those physical desires. And ignoring God's will. Still, God accomplished his purpose. Despite Isaac's sinfulness.

Next, we come to Rebekah. Now, I have one commentary which I like a great deal, which goes way out of the way to defend Rebekah's actions, but it just doesn't seem to explain the text very well. It really strains to make Rebekah look good. Let me read just a couple examples.

"Rebekah, as soon as she learned of Isaac's plans, acted immediately to prevent his carrying them out. Though she must have been very hesitant, as a good and faithful wife, to do anything but follow her husband's wishes, she evidently felt that, in this case, God's will must override her husband's will."

"Perhaps she intended to use this means to call Isaac's attention to his presumptuous determination to thwart God's will...Rebekah knew she was taking a terrible risk of permanently alienating both Isaac and Esau by this scheme...[But] if he could be made to realize that God's will was so important that Rebekah was willing to sacrifice even his own love for it, then perhaps the shock would be the means of bringing him back to his senses and get him to realize his error."

He goes on to excuse even the deceitful lying, writing that, "God does not approve of lying, and Jacob and Rebekah well knew this. They were sensitive and spiritual people; but they had decided that, as bad as deception might be in God's sight, it had become necessary in this case in order to prevent a much worse sin, that of blasphemously presuming to convey the most holy of God's promises to a man who neither wanted it nor would honor it, and to do so directly in the face of God's commandment against it."

And finally, he writes about occasions when it is proper to actually break one of God's commandments. "The one overriding criterion seems to be that such an exception can at best be

warranted only when a still greater principle, associated with the greater revealed purposes of God, will be sacrificed by legalistic adherence to the letter of the law...Jacob and Rebekah, in order to do what they thought was necessary to accomplish God's will, and to spare Isaac and Esau God's judgment for opposing his will, were willing [to carry out their plan.]"

Did you catch that? It's OK to lie and deceive if that becomes necessary to prevent a much worse sin. How dangerous, for that is nothing but the notion that the end justifies the means. It's OK to break one of God's commandments if that would protect a still greater principle. If that's true, then two wrongs really do make a right! And in that case, it was OK for Rebekah to break the law of God in order to spare Isaac and Esau God's judgment for opposing his will.

I can't agree with any of that! It is not OK to break God's laws in order to do what you think is necessary to accomplish God's will. How can you accomplish God's will by doing something that God's will forbids you to do! So, in this case,

II. REBEKAH ATTEMPTED TO FURTHER GOD'S PURPOSES IN HER OWN WISDOM.

And she was wrong. She was wrong to attempt to further God's purposes by her own earthly schemes. It was wrong. To put it bluntly, God doesn't need our help in order to bring about his own purposes. Don't ever get such an inflated ego to think that without your help, God won't be able to accomplish what he determines to accomplish. Indeed, God "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." Without our help!

Actually, Rebekah acted with reckless deceit. In this case, despite her godliness and honorable character which we've noted from chapter 26,

A. Rebekah's plan was indefensibly deceitful.

You cannot defend what she did. The end does not justify the means. And two wrongs do not make a right! Let me read through this scheme, then, with that perspective.

v.5-10

That's just as deceitful and as dishonest as the day was long! There is absolutely no excuse for what she did. And if you think that she had to do something, then she should have respectfully spoken to Isaac about his foolishness. There should be a very significant place for God to use his wife in stirring him on to spiritual faithfulness. As there should be for any married couple. But it ought NEVER to be done by deceitful manipulation!

Jacob, at first, understood the dangers of what was being suggested.

v.11-12

Rebekah cared very little about that.

v.13

Jacob did as his mother instructed, and she completed the deception with great attention to all five senses--including even smell and touch.

v.14-17

From this point on, Jacob is the one doing all the work, and we'll examine that in a moment. But let me again emphasize the utter deceitfulness of this whole plan. A wife deceiving her own husband. A son deceiving his own father. How could God possibly be pleased with that? Rebekah's plan was indefensibly deceitful. And,

B. It was dangerously reckless.

Let me explain. Rebekah really puts herself in a dangerous position. First, she asserts her authority over her son, making her responsible for his actions. She commands him to do this, recklessly incurring upon herself all the guilt which he will incur.

v.8 "Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to what I command you."

v.13 "Obey my voice."

Asserting authority can be dangerous, because those in authority assume responsibility for the actions of those under their authority. Sometimes, you have to assume authority, and act accordingly. Whether it's husbands over wives, parents over children, elders over church members, employers over employees, or government officials over evildoers. But there is a warning. For authority and responsibility are opposite sides of the very same coin. Those who act with authority over others also bear great responsibility not only for themselves, but also for those under their authority.

In this instance, Rebekah is abusing her authority over her son, dangerously commanding him to engage in deceitful scheming. And it was reckless. For Rebekah doesn't even give serious thought to Jacob's very appropriate reaction.

v.12-13

I shudder at those words, the same words used by the Jewish crowds when Pilate offered to release him.

Matt. 27:24 "When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." 25 And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children."

Such reckless foolishness, for his blood was upon them and upon their children. They were guilty, and as a nation, cut off from God.

Now, Rebekah didn't face such severe sanctions, and she remained an otherwise godly and faithful woman, but her attempts to further God's purposes with this deceitful scheme were misguided, at best. And accepting God's curse upon herself was reckless. She didn't consider the consequences for a moment.

Let me emphasize again, God doesn't need our help to accomplish his purposes. He may well use us to bring about what he has decreed, but ultimately, he is not dependent upon us. In his own sovereign power, he "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." Perfectly.

So, Isaac was in the wrong. So was Rebekah. And so were both of the boys!

III. JACOB AND ESAU DISREGARDED GOD'S PURPOSES IN THEIR OWN SELF-INTEREST.

As I said at the outset, all four people involved in this are in the wrong. The chief fault of the boys is their own self-interest. They both sought their father's blessing. But,

A. In seeking his father's blessing, Esau breaks his own vow regarding the birthright.

Remember what happened.

Gen. 25:29 Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. 30 And Esau said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary." Therefore his name was called Edom. 31 But Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright as of this day."

Gen. 25:32 "And Esau said, "Look, I am about to die; so what

is this birthright to me?" 33 Then Jacob said, "Swear to me as of this day." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright."

Esau swore an oath relinquishing the right of his birthright, which was the right of his father's blessing as the firstborn. He swore an oath, despising his birthright so that he could get some of Jacob's good red stew to eat. And by the very nature of that oath, he no longer had any right to seek his father's blessing. He had no right to come back and claim that which he had sold under oath.

And so we read in,

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."

It was an unfortunate oath, to be sure, but a valid one, nonetheless. In seeking his father's blessing, therefore, he was ignoring his oath. He should have simply confessed his prior foolishness, and sadly accepted the consequences of his actions. He should have honored his commitment made under oath, and just refused to accept from his father the blessing which was being offered.

Of course, he did nothing of the kind. He jumped at the opportunity to get back that which he had lost, and obviously thought little or nothing about breaking his oath. We'll look at his actions in more detail next week, in verses 30-46.

Then Jacob. That one commentary that so vigorously defends Rebekah equally defends Jacob. But that ignores the obvious description of events here.

B. In seeking his father's blessing, Jacob moves from deceit to dishonor to blasphemy.

Those are strong words, intentionally. It wasn't just deception, for deception led Jacob down the path to even greater sins, as lying and deception so often do in our own lives.

Let's start with the deception.
v.18-19

That's an outright lie! A lie designed to obtain for himself his father's blessing. Jacob flagrantly violates the ninth commandment. "You shall not lie." "You shall not bear false witness."

The deception continues. And it becomes a dishonor to his father. His father questions him, unsure of his identity. And Jacob mocks him, taking advantage of his old age and lack of clear eyesight.
v.21-27

Jacob allowed the sign of a kiss to be part of his betrayal of his own father, and is doing anything but granting the honor and respect to his father required by God's law. He kissed his own father to prove that he was someone else. He let his own father touch his hands, or the hairy skins put upon his hands, to prove that he was someone else.

He fed his father food which his mother had prepared, pretending that he was Esau and that he had prepared it. He made his father look like a fool! This is as flagrant a violation of

the fifth commandment as you find anywhere in the Bible. "Honor your father and your mother."

But there was one more commandment to break. One deeper level of sinfulness. One more offensive and heinous example of sin. The sin which started out as a simple lie, became the sin of giving personal dishonor to his father. And then it became blasphemy. Taking the Lord's name in vain, violating the third commandment.

Look at, v.20

What horrible blasphemy! It was bad enough to cover his hands with hairy goatskins. It was bad enough to offer his father the food his mother has prepared. It was bad enough to kiss him, wearing the clothes and therefore the smell of his brother. But to invoke God's name in this deceitful treachery! Blasphemy is an accurate description of what he did.

As another commentator writes, this is "almost the most flagrant instance of abuse of the divine name recorded anywhere in the Scriptures. This is lying and deceiving by God's name." It is blasphemous.

So where does that leave us? With four people, all acting improperly. So what happens? What is the consequence of all these sins being compounded together? The answer is easy. God brings to pass precisely what he determined beforehand. Again, the illustration of the crucifixion.

Acts 4:27 "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done."

God's sovereign purpose will be carried out. What God has determined will happen, will happen. Despite what sins we might commit. In this case, God brought about his sovereign will despite the sins of all four of these people.

IV. GOD ACCOMPLISHES HIS PURPOSES DESPITE THE SINFULNESS OF MAN.

And what was God's sovereign will? Well, he'd already revealed it, as we mentioned earlier. The blessing would be given to the younger of the boys, to Jacob. It was the blessing of God's covenant, passed down from Abraham to succeeding generations. And by the third generation here, there is already great controversy.

But God's purposes would stand. The line of the covenant would be established through Abraham. Isaac. Then Jacob. Not Esau, for God has spoken.

A. The line of God's covenant people would be traced through Jacob.

And so he received his father's blessing.
v.28-29

That blessing clearly continues the blessing given to Abraham by God himself. It was the blessing announced to Rebekah when the boys were still in her womb. And it is so clearly explained by the Apostle Paul,

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."

So the bottom line of all of this is that God will accomplish what he has determined to do. God will bring about everything that happens just as he has determined, in his own sovereign power. And I can't tell you how comforting a doctrine that is. God is in control.

I may well sin, and I do. I may well disobey God's revealed will, by disobeying his law. And, at times, I do. But even the awareness of my sin does not remove God's control from every aspect of my life. And so I don't need to live in fear, freed from the fear that something might happen apart from God's control.

I know that God will accomplish his sovereign purpose. I know that God will bring about that which he has determined beforehand, that which he ordained from before the foundation of the world. And I take great comfort and encouragement from that. I gain my security from it. I face the problems of life with that assurance.

And as a child of God, I know something about what God's eternal purposes are. I know that they are all working together for good. Knowing all of that, a believer can live with the life-changing assurance of,

Rom. 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

So whatever the circumstances of your life, whatever obstacles or uncertainties challenge you, the encouragement of this chapter in Genesis is God's ability to accomplish his purpose in every instance, for your good. With that encouragement, whatever you face in your own life, you can do so with the assurance and that confidence that God will work "all things according to the counsel of His will."