

Separation

Genesis 28:1-9

Jacob and Esau are very interesting characters, as we've seen these past few weeks. They occupy a very important place in the history of God's people which is revealed in the OT. And the one singular, most basic point to their story is the idea of separation. We've seen throughout Genesis how God separates his people from those who are not his people, starting right after the fall with enmity established between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

The two lines of mankind were separated by that enmity. So it is in each generation following Adam and Eve. The one chosen descendant through whom the covenant would be carried from generation to generation was separated from all the other descendants. The covenant with God was made with Seth, not Cain. It was Noah, not his brothers nor anyone else. Likewise, Shem, not his brothers Ham or Japheth. Then Abraham, not Nahor. And, of course, Isaac, not Ishmael. Then, as a climax to that repeated pattern, we see the God's choice of Jacob, not Esau. Jacob would be separated, even from his twin brother.

Not until the next generation of Jacob's children do we find that the covenant would embrace all the children. The twelve sons of Jacob would become the twelve tribes of Israel, all of them, the fullness of the nation of God's people. But until then, one son is separated from all the others.

As the climax of this whole idea of separation, never is it made clearer than with Jacob and Esau. With them, so explicitly, it was not a separation based on anything that they had done. Instead, theirs was a separation announced by God while the boys were still in their mother's womb. Before they were born. As we read

the past several weeks,

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."

There was a good reason for that separation between Jacob and Esau, a good illustration and demonstration of a very broad and general spiritual principle, that,

I. GOD SEPARATES HIS PEOPLE FROM ALL OTHERS.

On a personal level, that separation is physically put into place in our text this morning. Jacob and Esau are separated.

v.5

That separation, of course, came about as the result of Rebekah's plan. She wanted Jacob to be protected from Esau, so she commanded him to leave.

27:43 "Now therefore, my son, obey my voice: arise, flee to my brother Laban in Haran. 44 And stay with him a few days, until your brother's fury turns away."

But, with some diplomatic wisdom, Rebekah provokes Isaac into making the decision to send Jacob away, and to do so with his blessing in order to find an appropriate wife. Rebekah made that suggestion quite obvious.

27:46 And Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these who are the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?"

Isaac acted appropriately to that prompting.

v.1-2

v.5

So it was, in God's providence, that,

A. Jacob was separated from Esau as a protection from his fury.

Again, from the chapter we studied last week,

27:41-45

Jacob could not be killed, for the line of the covenant would be established through him. His life must be protected, and God would see to it that it was. Esau's fury would not be given the opportunity to be enraged. God's purposes would be fulfilled. Jacob would be separated from Esau.

It is worth noting that that separation foreshadows the final, ultimate, eternal separation that will take place at the final judgment. That separation is described by Jesus in,

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."

Speaking of the goats, then, Jesus declared,

Matt. 25:46 "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

That same separation is so clearly defined in,

John 5:28 "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29 and come

forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

I should tell you that this doctrine of separation is thoroughly rejected by the philosophers of our age, those who deny the whole notion of eternal judgment and the necessity of God's justice and wrath. The false thinking of our age denies this separation with the foolish idea of universal salvation or universal redemption. Everyone gets to heaven, so the popular thinking goes, just by different routes.

Well, that just isn't true. Jacob and Esau show us with their very lives that God separates his people from all others. And the certainty of that eternal separation calls us to separate ourselves from the world in which we live now. Even now, we are called to detach ourselves from being yoked together with unbelievers, the direct commandment of,

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."

Paul continues...

2Cor. 6:17 Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."

Just to be sure that you understand the implications applications of that separation, let me read the very next verse

which Paul writes,

2Cor. 7:1 “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

That’s what it means for us to be separate from unbelievers. To “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

Paul actually quotes from the OT here, from the prophecy of Isaiah.

Isa. 52:11 “Depart! Depart! Go out from there, Touch no unclean thing; Go out from the midst of her, Be clean, You who bear the vessels of the LORD. 12 For you shall not go out with haste, Nor go by flight; For the LORD will go before you, And the God of Israel will be your rear guard.”

That prophecy is quoted again in the great warning given in, Rev. 18:1 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. 2 And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! 3 For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.” 4 And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. 5 For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”

With regard to the sinfulness of unbelievers, God says to his people, “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in

her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues.” He says to us, “Touch no unclean thing!” “Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the vessels of the LORD.”

Ultimately, that is the application of the separation of Jacob from Esau, a separation brought about by God’s eternal purpose and sovereign decree. God separates his people from all others. And our lives should reflect it!

But what about Esau? What happened to him? Interestingly, God tells us a great deal about what happened to Esau. First, we read,

v.6-9

There is a sense in that that he may well be softening his heart, realizing that he had married two wives very displeasing to his parents. So he marries a third, a daughter of Ishmael. But even so, his spiritual dullness is obvious, for Ishmael, too, was separated from God’s people. He, too, was cast off. Ishmael himself was identified as one separated from the covenant which God made with his people. The covenant would be made with Isaac, not Ishmael. With the child of the free woman, not the child of the slave woman.

But despite his lack of spiritual perception, still God is faithful to bestow a level of blessing upon him, much like Ishmael. And God is faithful to record the personal accounts of Esau and his descendants, the Edomites.

Let me introduce Genesis 36 at this point, a chapter devoted to the descendants of Esau.

36:1 “Now this is the genealogy of Esau, who is Edom.”

The whole chapter is outlines first with a description of Esau

and his wives and children, then his descendants. Then the chiefs of Edom, followed by the chiefs of the Horites, a people whom the Edomites dispossessed. Then we read about the Kings of Edom, and another final classification of chiefs of Edom. We'll not take the time to read through that list, nor to study it verse by verse in a sermon, but do take note of,

36:6 "Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the persons of his household, his cattle and all his animals, and all his goods which he had gained in the land of Canaan, and went to a country away from the presence of his brother Jacob. 7 For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together, and the land where they were strangers could not support them because of their livestock. 8 So Esau dwelt in Mount Seir."

Esau is Edom. There were actually some temporal blessings, that is, blessings that apply only temporarily. Blessings that apply only in this age, in this world.

But,

B. Esau received those temporal blessings in an area separate from Jacob.

Again, keep in mind God's overall purpose in these events. Separation. Jacob and Esau were separated. And from that example, we see that,

II. GOD COMMANDS HIS PEOPLE TO KEEP THE LINE OF THE COVENANT PURE.

The line of Esau would not remain pure, for he had married two Hittite women, women from among the Canaanites. But God's command for the line of Jacob was to avoid that grievous sin. The command was direct and easy to understand,

v.1

Indeed,

A. The need for spiritual faithfulness is shown by the choice of a godly wife.

Most especially, as a matter of utmost concern, Isaac commanded his son to marry within the family.

v.2

Here the command was to marry a cousin, which was not forbidden in Scripture. Why this direction from father to son? What's the significance of this? Marriage is a unique human relationship. It is the only relationship where we are actually told that two become one. It is a union that necessarily combines a person with everything about another person.

It is not merely a physical union, for the physical union of two becoming one flesh is but the outward expression of the inward union. The deepest union is a spiritual union. And therefore, choosing a wife from among God's people was an absolutely essential part of spiritual faithfulness.

Isaac, of course, had received the same instruction from his father, Abraham. And, you will remember, Abraham didn't leave it up to Isaac himself to find a wife. He sent his servant to do the job.

Gen. 24:1 "Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. 2 So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, "Please, put your hand under my thigh, 3 and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; 4 but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac."

It was absolutely essential for those in the line of the covenant to marry only in the Lord, to find wives also from among God's covenant people. And later, as his people were to enter and conquer the land of Canaan, the one thing, perhaps above any

other, that the Lord commanded them was not to intermarry with the Canaanites! And clearly, spiritual faithfulness and choosing a godly wife were directly connected.

The command is given in,

Exod. 34:11 Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I am driving out from before you the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 12 Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. 13 But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images 14 (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), 15 lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, 16 and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods.”

And later, as they were preparing to enter the land, the command was repeated in Deuteronomy. The need for spiritual faithfulness is shown by the choice of a godly wife. The opposite is also true.

B. The evil of spiritual unfaithfulness is shown by the choice of a heathen wife.

Esau is the one who shows us this. He had done that evil.

Gen. 26:34 “When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. 35 And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah.”

The evil of marrying unbelieving wives is revealed by the grief

which it caused Rebekah.

27:46. “And Rebekah said to Isaac, “I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these who are the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?”

As I’ve noted, Esau came to understand that evil, at least partially.

v.8

“Did not please” refers to that which was evil. What an evil thing it was to marry an unbeliever. But still, though Esau doesn’t marry another Hittite woman, he still marries from the line of Ishmael, not from the line of God’s covenant people.

v.9

God commands his people to keep the line of the covenant pure. And the application of that principle certainly carries over today. If you are a believer, if you belong to the people of God, the one whom you choose to marry must share that same faith. If you are a Christian, then the person whom you marry must also be a Christian. God commands his people to keep the line of the covenant pure. And with that purity,

III. GOD PROMISES HIS PEOPLE THE BLESSINGS OF THE COVENANT.

This chapter is really about that blessing.

v.3

This is the blessing of the covenant with Abraham passed on to the third generation. Notice the similarities,

Gen. 17:1 “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. 2 And I will make My covenant

between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.” 3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 4 “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. 8 Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

That could well be the clearest definition of the covenant of grace found anywhere in Scripture. Everything is there. All the blessings. And notice how God identifies himself in giving this covenant. “I am Almighty God.” That name is used again in 28:3, when Isaac passes the covenant blessing down to Jacob. “May God Almighty bless you.”

“God Almighty” in Hebrew is El Shadai, God of power, God of might. God Almighty is a good translation. Indeed, blessings will come only if God is mighty enough, powerful enough, to bring them to pass.

And, of course, he is. So here we have a prophetic utterance at its best. Gone are all Isaac’s attempts to thwart God’s purposes. Now, he speaks them. Prophetically. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Infallibly. This was not merely a father’s wish for his son. This was the authoritative declaration of God Almighty, spoken through his servant the prophet.

It was, as we’ve seen numerous times in the study of the

covenant with Abraham, a two-fold blessing. First,

A. The blessing of abundant numbers.

This is so specifically repeated.

Gen.17:2 “And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.” 3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 4 “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.”

And here,

v.3

Jacob would become an assembly of peoples. A great assembly. His numbers would increase. He would be abundantly fruitful. The rest of the book of Genesis will describe the fulfillment of that promise. By the time the nation of Israel would be established after the great exodus out of Egypt, we read that there were 600,000 fighting men, letting us estimate perhaps a total population of two million.

God’s word was true.

v.3

The second blessing was,

B. The blessing of a rich inheritance.

v.4

The land.

But remember, that land would be unmeasurable. It wouldn’t

be restricted to the relatively small country we think of as Israel today. The land would actually be the whole earth. Ultimately, the promise extends to the new earth. And God's people, his covenant people, saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, will inherit that new earth for all eternity.

That was what Abraham was looking for!

Hebr. 11:9 "By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Further down, we read that,

Hebr. 11:13 "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."

And just so that you know that this same promise applies to you today, we read in,

Hebr. 13:14 "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come."

So these covenant blessings are for us. The blessing of abundant numbers! Indeed, God's people will fill the earth. Not just a small remnant, but a great multitude. As many as the stars in the sky and grains of sand on the shore. And the blessing of a rich inheritance. An inheritance that has already been

bequeathed to us, which awaits only the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Knowing that those blessings are ours in Jesus Christ, what should we do? Sing his praise. And worship!

In the words of the Apostle Peter,

1Pet. 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

So this morning, think of your inheritance, the blessing of the covenant. And worship the author of your salvation who has promised you those blessings, worship the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!