
GENESIS: IT ALL STARTS HERE

GOD'S PREVAILING GRACE

GENESIS 25:19-26:5

19 These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac, 20 and **Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah**, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife.

21 And **Isaac prayed to the Lord** for his wife, because she was barren.

And **the Lord granted his prayer**, and Rebekah his wife conceived. 22 The children struggled together within her, and she said, "*If it is thus, why is this happening to me?*" So she went to inquire of the Lord.

23 And the Lord said to her, "*Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, **the older shall serve the younger.***"

24 When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. 25 The first came out **red**, all his body like a **hairy cloak**, so they called his name **Esau**. 26 Afterward his brother came out with his hand **holding Esau's heel**, so his name was called **Jacob**. **Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.**

27 When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. 28 Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. 30 And Esau said to Jacob, "*Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!*" (Therefore his name was called Edom.) 31 Jacob said, "*Sell me your birthright now.*" 32 Esau said, "*I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?*" 33 Jacob said, "*Swear to me now.*" So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. **Thus Esau despised his birthright.**

INTRODUCTION

Isaac, like Abraham, was blessed by God. Isaac's son, Jacob, also enjoyed the blessing of God. However, when we read the account of the "life and times" of these men, we do not see picturesque examples of godliness and fidelity. Instead, we see the same expressions of sinful human nature that we observe in all people everywhere. In such a display, we are reminded of what it really means that God is gracious. God's gracious blessing is based on (you guessed it) grace. In this message we will look at the dysfunction of sinful humanity and the grace by which God blesses sinners.

MESSAGE OUTLINE:

(1) A SCENE OF TOTAL DYSFUNCTION

(2) GOD'S GRACE PREVAILS!

(3) BE HUMBLLED BY YOUR DYSFUNCTION & BE GRATEFUL FOR GOD'S GRACE!

EXPOSITION:

Bringing us up to speed:

In chapter 23 we read that Sarah, Abraham's wife, died. She was beloved by both Abraham and Isaac, their son of promise, and the details of her burial demonstrate great care and love.

Chapter 24 introduces us to Isaac's wife, Rebekah, who is from Abraham's family and not a Canaanite. This desire for distinction on the part of Abraham is welcomed by his relatives, and Rebekah surprisingly gives herself to the unfolding providence of God. At Rebekah's departure from her family, on her way to meet her husband-to-be, she is blessed with poetic and prophetic words. Her family sings of her fertility and the prosperity that shall accompany her many children.

Chapter 25 begins with some closing details of Abraham's life and the particulars of his descendants. Of course, his son of promise, Isaac, is in prominent focus there as well. Abraham sent Ishmael and his other sons away to the east, away from Isaac, but Abraham gave Isaac "all that he had," and Isaac remained in Canaan (the land of promise).

In the middle of chapter 25, there is a direct shift to Isaac and the events of his life, but there also arises an immediate conflict. Isaac, no doubt, shared the knowledge of his father's blessing (which had also been for "his offspring") with Rebekah. Additionally, Rebekah heard the song of blessing from her family when she left home, and we most certainly expect to read about the children who come from this doubly-blessed couple. However, Rebekah, we are told, was barren...

Huffington Post Article:

Nyasha Junior, an Assistant Professor of Religion at Temple University wrote an article lamenting Jacob's treatment of Esau. She said the episode offered "low-hanging fruit for a sermon illustration or Sunday School lesson." That statement is true enough, for there is a fairly direct message here, but she appears to have been looking on the ground for said 'fruit.' Junior summarizes, "Esau agrees to sell his birthright. Although Jacob was not due to receive the larger share of the inheritance, he obtains it from his brother 'fair and square.'" Then the author asks, "But was this a fair deal?"¹

Ah... Here is the rub indeed! The author goes on to preach a message of compassion for those in need, somehow making this story a fable with the intended moral imperative of 'helping those in need.'

This story is not about Jacob, as manipulative as he was. It is not about Esau, as brutish and impulsive as he was. It isn't even about family dysfunction, as twisted as the family in focus was.

NO! This story is about God's gracious and prevailing grace!

(1) A SCENE OF TOTAL DYSFUNCTION

◆ ISAAC (DEFIANT)

- **One positive: he is a powerful, faithful intercessor (like Abraham)**
 - Isaac prayed for 20 years that God would grant him and Rebekah a child (Gen. 25:20-21; cf. Gen. 25:26), and "the LORD granted his prayer" (Gen. 25:21).
- **Many negatives: he (like Abraham) proves to be a typical sinner**
 - He plays favorites with his older son (Gen. 25:28).
 - He selfishly claims that his wife is his sister, putting her well-being in danger and showing disbelief in God's promise (Gen. 26:6-7).
 - He tried to "bless" Esau rather than Jacob, and thus directly assaulted God's expressed plan to do otherwise (Gen. 27:1-4; cf. Gen. 25:23).

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nyasha-junior/all-in-the-family-genesis_b_5564581.html

◆ REBEKAH (SELFISH)

• **Rebekah is prideful and selfish**

- She leaves home in order to marry a stranger in a strange land with a view to riches and prosperity (Gen. 24:52-58).
- She hears the blessing of her family – children and kingdoms – and she is quite upset when she experiences any difficulty with her miraculous and long-awaited pregnancy (Gen. 25:21-22).
- She plays favorites with her younger son (Gen. 25:28), and even urges him towards a deceptive conspiracy against her husband and her older son (Gen. 27:5-13).

◆ ESAU (BRUTISH)

• **His name means *hairy* (Edom means red)**

- The idea we are given is that he is the picture of brutish barbarism.
 - He was a hunter and outdoorsman – these things are not inherently bad or good (Gen. 25:27).
 - He thought only of the ‘now’ and nothing of those things that truly matter, just think of him selling his family inheritance for a single bowl of ‘red stuff’ (Gen. 25:29-34).
 - He immediately resorted to violence when he was confronted with the consequences of his own desires (Gen. 27:41).

◆ JACOB (CONNIVING)

• **His name means *heel* (it is significant that God changes it to *Israel*)**

- Positively, the name could mean “*safeguard or heel-guard;*” but negatively (and warranted by his actions), the name could also mean “*heel-grabber or cheat*”
 - Jacob is the picture of domestic cunning
 - He was a quite homebody – these are not inherently good or bad (Gen. 25:27).
 - He was a shrewd opportunist, looking to get ahead at the expense of others (Gen. 25:29-34).
 - He conspired against and lied to his own father in a deceptive plot to extort his brother’s inheritance (Gen. 27:19).

With such a panorama in view, who in the world should God bless?!

- ◆ IT IS WORSE THAN YOU THINK! A QUICK WALK THROUGH THE 1ST HALF OF GEN.
 - The first recorded husband and wife (Adam & Eve) listen to an offer of selfish gain and directly disobey God (Genesis 3).
 - Their firstborn, Cain, kills his brother, Abel (Genesis 4:8).
 - A handful of generations later, everyone on the planet (except Noah) was utterly wicked; their “every intention” was “evil continually” (Gen. 6:5).
 - Noah was spared from the world-wide flood, but he was soon after drunk and exposed (Gen. 9:21).
 - As Noah’s sons populated the earth, their progeny defied God and built a city-sized monument to their own greatness as a direct offense to God (Gen. 11:1-4).
 - Some generations later, God selects one man through whom He will bless this world of disgusting rebels – Abram (Gen. 12:1-3).
 - Sarah (Abram’s wife) was barren, so God’s promise to provide an “offspring” through this couple was hard to believe (Gen. 16:1). In her disbelief, Sarah forced her maidservant to conceive a child with Abram, and he was complicit in this sinful arrangement (Gen. 16).
 - Lot (Abram’s nephew) did not want to leave sexually perverse hometown, but God sent angels to graciously pull him away from the judgment God brought there (Gen. 19:1-29).
 - Of course, we have already seen Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob’s dysfunction.
 - And this is only the beginning! It becomes nearly impossible to track the utter dysfunction, because it is so prevalent that virtue and propriety are confused.

So, who in the world should God bless?!

No one! No one is deserving!

There is no quality candidate for God’s blessing of favor!

Bleak hopelessness is what we should expect... But, praise God, it is not what we see!

(2) GOD'S GRACE PREVAILS!

◆ JACOB IS GRACIOUSLY BLESSED

- **Jacob is prophesied to be the blessed “offspring”**
 - “LORD said to [Rebekah], ‘*Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, **the older shall serve the younger***’ (Gen. 25:23).
 - Paul tells us in Romans 9 (v10-13) that this word from God was a pronouncement of His decisive and active love (*agape*).
- **Jacob receives God’s blessing in the prophetic words of his father**
 - Isaac says to Jacob, “*May God give you of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!*” (Gen. 27:28–29).

◆ THAT SAME GRACIOUS BLESSING STANDS AS A SIGNATURE OF GOD’S GRACE

- **“I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...”**
 - God makes Himself known by His gracious blessing of sinful men!
 - When Moses asked God for His name, the reply was profound – “I AM” (Ex. 3:14).
 - God continued by saying, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the **God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob**, has sent me to you.’ **This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered** throughout all generations” (Ex 3:15).
 - Think of the paradox of such a moniker!
 - Abraham was a man of faith, for sure; but he is no picture of holiness or perfect obedience.
 - Isaac similarly has some positive flashes of trust in God, but he too is lacking in personal virtue.
 - Jacob believes the promise of God, but seeks God’s grace through wicked means.

- To be the God of such men is no claim to any virtuous lineage! It is a claim to gracious grace that blesses the utterly undeserving!
 - It is as though God says, *“Remember Me always as the God who graciously blesses the guilty and scandalously claims the dirtiest sinners as children and heirs of promise.”*

◆ WE LEARN ABOUT THE DISTINCTIVE OF GOD’S GRACE

- **NOT performance-based**
 - God’s blessing does not come only to those sinners who somehow do enough good to outweigh their bad.
 - God’s blessing does not come to only those people whose good deeds (even religious ones) rise to a certain level.
- **NOT value-based**
 - God’s blessing does not come only to those whose value is above another – more intelligent, sincere, loving, capable, or needy
- **The Scripture affirms that grace is based on God’s “pleasure” & “glory”**
 - Teaching His disciples about anxiety and trusting in God’s promises, Jesus said, **“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”** (Luke 12:32).
 - Jesus quoted from the prophet Isaiah as He read from the scroll in the synagogue, saying, **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”** (Is. 61:1,2). The prophet goes on to say, **“to give [God’s people crowns of glory] instead of ashes... to [bring] gladness instead of mourning”** (Is. 61:3). And, why has God anointed Christ to proclaim such favor? **“so that he [God] may be glorified”** (Is. 61:3).
 - The Apostle Paul says our inherited blessing is **“according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that [purpose or motivation statement] we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory”** (Eph. 1:11–12).

(3) BE HUMBLD BY YOUR DYSFUNCTION & BE GRATEFUL FOR GOD'S GRACE!

◆ BE HUMBLD BY YOUR OWN DYSFUNCTION

- **Let's not pretend that you have it all together**
- **Don't imagine that you will one day shake off your dysfunction**
- **Be honest... Even as a Christian, with real and fervent love for Christ, you still observe dysfunction in your desires and in your life**

◆ BE GRATEFUL FOR GOD'S GRACE!

- Let's not be offended at God's grace because we are unwilling to admit our need
 - **Let's run into the light with gratitude for the One who covers our shame**
- Let's not try to use Jesus as a means to an end, thinking that He is a kind of self-help guru
 - **Let's feel the weight of our abiding sinful desires and rejoice that there is One who has promised to graciously remove them**
- Let's not kid ourselves about what it means to be a Christian, putting on a happy face
 - **Let's confess our sinful heart (both to God and to one another), and let's all lean into God's grace with humble gratitude**

MY PRAYERS

- May God confront our foolish pride and humble us before Him.
- May God comfort us by bringing to our remembrance those sinners who have received His grace before us.
- May God correct our thinking and transform our living, so that we may live to His glory and proclaim the Gospel of such glorious... prevailing... grace.

APPLICATION:

- (1) What is this passage asking me to believe about God and myself?
- (2) What is this passage asking me to believe about sin and salvation?
- (3) What is this passage asking me to believe about the world and the world to come?
- (4) What sin is this passage forbidding? And What duty is this passage commanding?
- (5) What grace, fruit, or gift of the Spirit is this passage calling for?
- (6) How should this passage impact my relationship with God? My family? My friends? My neighbors? My enemies?
- (7) Is this passage addressed to believers, unbelievers, hypocrites, doubters, etc?
- (8) What does this passage teach me about my responsibilities as a church member, a citizen, an employee/employer?
- (9) Is there an example here I am being urged to follow or avoid?
- (10) What is there in this passage to lead me into worship?
- (11) Does this passage admonish, rebuke, convict, or warn me? Why and how?
- (12) Does this passage encourage, comfort, console, or promise me? Why and how?
- (13) What is this passage asking me to question or examine?
- (14) Does this verse ask me to look at the past, the present, or the future?
- (15) Is this passage addressing my mind, my emotions, my will, my desires, or my conscience?
- (16) Is this passage focused on me as an individual or upon the church (local or universal)?
- (17) What is this passage intended to change in me? My family? My church? My workplace? My world?