

**Sermon Notes: Steve Stanis,
“Birthright Robbery (part 2)”****05 May 2024****Readings: Genesis 26:34-28, Galatians 3:13-18, Matt 8:5-13**

It reads as the story, “He said, she said...!”

Jacob is a memorable Old Testament figure. He is an unheroic hero in the Bible. Today’s passage is full of deceit and failings. It is a tragedy from beginning to end. Perhaps a script for the first opera. Last week we learnt of the sovereignty of God, the sinfulness (fallen nature) of God’s people, the grace of God, the responsibility of God’s people taking failed sinners (fallen people) and He turns them into trophies of His grace!

We need to put Jacob into the context of Genesis and what it is all about. The first 11 chapters show people spiralling away from God. Then, in Genesis 12, God comes to one man, Abraham, and He promises to save the world through Abraham’s family. It is from the line of Abraham that God will choose someone each generation to carry on the Messianic seed. So, every generation, one child will be chosen to teach the family to walk in God’s ways.

This will continue through the generations until the seed, the King, the Lord of Lords, will come and make it possible to walk in God’s ways.

Abraham has two sons. Isaac marries Rebekah, and their son chosen by God is Jacob. They have twin boys. The oldest is Esau, then comes Jacob. It is Jacob whom God has chosen. He is the son of God’s promise.

This narrative that we have read, that starts at the end of chapter 26, and concludes at verse 9 of chapter 28, clearly relays Jacob asking Esau to prepare to be given the blessing before he dies. Rebekah is furious that Isaac has not chosen her favourite child; Jacob.

We read about the plan Rebekah hatches in the Bible reading. Jacob is scared that Isaac will find out that he is faking it, so Rebekah says a chilling thing. She says that the curse can fall on her, rather than her son.

Today I will focus on four practical applications of this passage: the power of blessing, the deep need for blessing that we all have, how we look in the wrong places for blessing and where true blessing can be found.

1) The Power of Blessing

The first misunderstanding about blessing is that Rebekah and Jacob thought they could steal it. Equally, Jacob and Esau thought it was stolen. On first reading, you wonder why Isaac didn’t just correct things and say, “Sorry, there has been a mistake, the blessing is really for Esau”.

Why couldn’t Isaac take it back? To understand this, we need to understand what a blessing is in the Bible. The blessing gives the rights to be head of the clan, “all will bow down to you”. This narrative assumes that genuine symbolic actions have abiding power and that spoken words between a parent and a child shape human life. Do you know the saying, “Sticks and stones can break my bones?” This passage changes the end “but words can break my very soul”. We know words that have been spoken to us, words of affirmation and blessing, or words

of condemnation and criticism, move into our lives and operate like a power. They too easily program our self-appreciation, or lack thereof.

If off-hand words linger, and affect us so badly; how much more the weight of words shared on a death bed?

Any blessing is like a spiritual discernment of who God has made a person to be. This blessing is not just good wishes, it is discerning who they are. The blessing is using empowering words to be the person they were created to be. If you have ever been blessed, you will never forget it. This is an amazing experience, when God uses a wise, discerning person to look deep into who you are and affirm what God is doing in your life, and they empower you to get on and do it. Isaac realises that what he did was much more than well wishing. It had a power from God. Isaac was affirming Jacob, empowering him to be the person God had created him to be.

2) The deep need we all have for blessing

The second thing we learn, is how deeply we need this. Our lives are distorted without it. Without a blessing, we are going to struggle. Jacob comes to Isaac desperate for blessing. When he approaches Isaac, Isaac says, "Who is it?" The literal Hebrew meaning is, "Who are you?" Jacob answers, "I am Esau, your first born". Later, when Esau arrives, and Jacob asks the same question, Esau answers, "I am your first born, Esau." In the Hebrew language, the emphasis in a sentence is on the last thing said. Therefore, Jacob is trying to bypass the lie quickly, so that he can get to what he really wants to say, which is that he is the first born. Deal with lies in real time. Never postpone truth. It has costs with consequences.

Jacob knew that Esau had always been favoured. It is how Jewish law worked. The first born was always going to receive the blessing. But it was more than this for Jacob. Esau had always been his dad's favourite, and Jacob wanted validation.

Aren't we the same? We want the people we most admire in the world to value us. This passage speaks loudly that self-worth comes from those we value and look up to. If we don't get blessing or validation from our those we value, especially family members, we struggle. This is where church life can speak so powerfully into people's lives. When someone sees God working in our lives and someone else says, "I see it". This is the blessing of the first born.

3) We look in the wrong places for blessing.

Thirdly, Jacob is a frightening example of how most of us try to get blessing.

To get blessing, Jacob couldn't be himself. To get blessing, he dressed up like Esau, smelt like Esau, cooked like Esau. He couldn't be himself. Jacob being himself was never going to get blessing. He was too timid, too shy, too indoors. He was never going to get blessing from his father. So, he dressed up like somebody else, he became somebody else. He hid his true self.

Are we a bit the same? Do we let people see our flaws and weaknesses? Do we strive for love, or blessing, from the wrong people?

One of the ways to get blessing is to come to church dressed as "a Christian". I'm serving. I've got it worked out. I don't have too many flaws. We don't want anyone to think we haven't got it together. We want the blessing of others here.

But how false is it if we have dressed up, if we have put on the personae, and it is not real. When Isaac gave Jacob the last test, and smelled him, Jacob smelt like the outdoors, do you think Jacob felt affirmation that the blessing was his? He must have felt like a fraud for a long time. He knew this blessing, as much as he wanted it, was not for him.

All the blessings or affirmations are not going to sit comfortably if you have to hide who you are. Dressing up can start with clothes, flow into our opinions, through our words and actions into our appearances!

The end of this story is bitter. Esau wants to kill Jacob, so Rebekah sends Jacob far away. Esau loses his life to anger. Rebekah loses the son she loves. She never sees him again. And Jacob goes away penniless, clan less. Everybody's life falls apart. Secrets and deceit divide; they always cause damage and destruction.

4) Where can true blessing be found?

When Isaac realises the deceit, he says to Esau, "Indeed, Jacob will be blessed". This is a complete U-turn for Isaac. He has been asking the question about the deceit, but then he affirms, "Indeed, he will be blessed".

Isaac has realised that God will work His purposes out, despite the events that have played out. God's will is greater than our poor choices or failings. God, in His grace, works in the lives of unworthy people.

The Bible reiterates this point time and again. Scripture is clear that people constantly and consistently choose to do life from a human perspective. A human perspective is a world full of people like Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Esau, and us! But Scripture is also clear that God works in and through such people to accomplish His purpose.

The Bible is about God's plan of redemption and God **will** bring His grace into the lives of scandalous people who don't seek it, and don't deserve it, continually resist it, and don't even appreciate it. "It is known as learning the hard way." It is only when you come through it, can you look back and see the benefit!

The first thing Isaac had to understand, and the message we have to take away from this narrative, is that God works through grace.

When Isaac says that "Indeed, he will be blessed", he is accepting God's grace. Remember from Genesis 25:23, when God said,

"The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

Isaac has been wrestling with this all these years. But in this moment, he has come to accept God's grace. Isaac had wanted to go the world's way, the favourite, the first born receiving the blessing. Now he was ready to go God's way. Finally, he is resting in God's grace. He surrenders his resistance.

This is what we are called to do. We get God's blessing by accepting His grace. Jacob was wrong in his deceit and yet God's plan is being fulfilled. The generations of the first-born in Abraham's family bring us to Jesus. The Bible tells us that Jesus is the first born in all creation. Jesus has lived, from the beginning of time, with first born blessing.

But Jesus left that first born blessing, He came to Earth and He died on a cross, so that the blessing given to Abraham might come to those who turn to God in faith.

Jesus Christ dressed up like us, and got the curse we deserve, so that, when we believe in Jesus Christ, we can be clothed like Him. Didn't Rebekah foreshadow this, and she didn't even know what she was saying, when she told Jacob she would take the curse instead of Him.

If we are like Jacob, trying to deceive God, dressing ourselves up in falseness and lies. This only leads to fear and brokenness.

Rather, we need to dress up with Christ, so that when we believe in Him, we get the first-born blessing.

Hebrews 12:22-24

"But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant."

We are all first-born when we stand in the love and redemption of Jesus Christ, like we are the only first-born in the family of God, and yet we all are together. Uniquely with God's purposes for your life.

Jesus said, Father, love them, even as you love me.

When you know this blessing, when you see Jesus dressing up like you, so you can dress up like Him, we can live now knowing the Spirit of God is poured out on us. The Spirit stops this being an intellectual exercise and makes it an experience with God. We need to experience God saying, "You are my beloved".

Only when you have this blessing inside, can you really get outside and begin to bless others. Our characters are flawed yet the Spirit flows through your character!

Blessing is not complementing people, so they like us. Blessing others is not about us. Only when we know God's blessing, can we be a blessing. To be a blessing, we are looking to empower others to be the person God made them to be.

So, this week, accept the power of God's blessing so that your deep need for blessing is fulfilled. Trust in the work of Jesus our Saviour, this is the true blessing of the first-born, and be a blessing to others, because we are first-born children of God.

Amen