

Jacob Receives Isaac's Blessing

Fall Quarter: God's World and God's People

Unit 3: God Blesses and Creates Regardless

Sunday school lesson for the week of November 11, 2018

By Dr. Nita Crump

Lesson Scripture: Genesis 27:1-28:5

Key Verses: Genesis 27:23

Purpose: To grasp that our sinfulness will not thwart God's will.

This lesson builds on the complications of family relationships between brothers that we explored in the last lesson. Jacob and Esau are no closer to each other now than they were in the last lesson when Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew. Rebekah and Isaac each have a favorite son and their efforts to boost the favorite creates competition and more ill-will between the brothers.

When this lesson starts, we find Isaac seeking to bless Esau without blessing Jacob, which was unusual. Most blessings found in scripture involve all the male children, but Isaac only invited Esau. Rebekah overheard the instructions given by Isaac to Esau and decided to take matters into her own hands. She cooked up a scheme and pressed Jacob to follow through. Jacob didn't object to the deception as much as he questioned whether it would work or not. It seems that he wasn't above deceiving his father as long as he thought he could get away with it. Rebekah managed to convince him the deception would work, and he agreed to follow her instructions.

When Jacob took food into Isaac, Isaac's ears told him it was Jacob, but his other senses were deceived into believing it was Esau. Isaac blessed Jacob with Esau's blessing, and when the real Esau came with food, Isaac had nothing left for him. Esau's anger at the deception put Jacob's life at risk and Jacob had to leave home. The younger son who had bought his older brother's birthright and then deceived his father into giving him the older brother's blessing had to live with the consequences of his actions – being forced to leave home without any knowledge of when, if ever, he would be able to return. If you looked in a dictionary for a definition of the phrase “dysfunctional family,” you might see a portrait of Isaac and his family.

I read an illustration once about what happens when you shake Coke in a bottle. You know the answer to that. Pick up a carbonated beverage, give the container a good shake, and then open it. What happens? What's inside spews out all over the place. We humans are the same. Shake us up and what happens? What's inside our hearts may very well come spewing out. We aren't much different from Jacob. We want what we want when we want it and we can become very unhappy when we don't get it.

I think there are three lessons we can learn from this story. First, we can learn that actions have consequences. When Jacob's true character showed in such a spectacular way, the consequence was that fear for his life drove him to leave his lifelong home. He had to run. I expect he spent the first few days and nights looking over his shoulder to see if Esau was following him. He had to give up everything he was hoping to obtain through the purchase of the birthright and the stealing of the blessing. All his deceptive actions were for naught as he left all the worldly possessions behind.

Second, sometimes God allows success in less than moral situations to teach a greater lesson later. It is possible that Jacob would never have been receptive to God's presence had he not been on the run and afraid for his life. In his fearful, weary state, Jacob was willing to hear a message from God. More on that in the next lesson.

Finally, and most importantly, we learn what we can expect from God when we demonstrate our unworthiness. We can expect grace. We can expect forgiveness when we repent. We can expect that God will continue to stay faithful to his promises.

The good news is that God is faithful and will keep his promises. None of the jealousy, hostility, or conflict present in this family would prevent God from keeping his promise to Abraham. This story demonstrates the difference between humans and God. Jacob is a mess of character flaws. He is a lying, deceiving, conniving, me-first kind of person. God is none of the above. God is gracious, patient, and faithful to keep his promises despite the character of the humans involved in the story. Our sinfulness will not stop God's will from being done. And that, brothers and sisters, is great good news for all us sinful human beings.

Another piece of good news is that we don't have to remain a Jacob kind of person. If we open ourselves to the presence of God, he will work within us to create the kind of person he wants us to be.

(Information in this lesson was drawn from *The New Application Commentary, Genesis, From biblical text...to contemporary life*, John H. Walton, p 554 - 577 and the Teacher's Edition of the *Adult Bible Studies, Uniform Series, International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching*.)

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