

# Love for the Unlovely: The Story of Grace in the Life of Jacob

*A Stolen Blessing (Genesis 27:1-46)*

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC English Service on February 16, 2025

## Introduction

- ❖ As we continue in our series through the life of Jacob, it's becoming more apparent that these biblical characters – these patriarchs of the faith – are messed up. They make poor choices. Cowardly choices. Selfish choices. They play favorites with their children. They manipulate one another. They lie and cheat to get what they want. It's not a pretty picture.
  - And that's what I love about the Bible. **I love the fact that it doesn't whitewash and cover up the messy lives of biblical characters.** Who are supposed to be the founders of the faith. It gives me much more confidence that we're reading true accounts of historical characters. Not puff pieces. Not hagiography. **These are true stories of the real-life choices made by sinners just like us.**
    - Who, at the same time, were recipients of God's grace and had the honor of being the patriarchs of the Chosen line that would, one day, produce the Chosen Messiah. Who grows up to rescue these patriarchs from their sins – along with all who share in their faith. So when I read Genesis 27 – a chapter full of bad choices – I try not to let it bother me. Instead, I try to learn from it. **Because it provides us a perfect opportunity to learn the smart way.**
  
- ❖ I remember the first discipleship group I led, back when I was leading the youth ministry here. I remember a trip I took them on that summer they graduated from high school. They were all going to college. So I shared my testimony and my college experience.
  - And I was transparent about the mistakes I made in college. **I tried to warn them to not make the same ones.** But I told them, "I know some of you are stubborn like me. I know you hear me, but some of you are still going to make those same bad choices because you want to see for yourself. **You want to learn the hard way.** To learn from first-hand experience. But, according to Scripture, that's the foolish way."
  
- ❖ **I was urging those young men to learn the smart way.** The prudent way. To learn from the mistakes of others. **Proverbs 22:3** says, "*The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.*" So the simple, foolish way is to see danger before you – to hear a warning, a testimony – and do nothing about it. Convincing yourself that you'll just have to find out for yourself. But that's not the only option. There is another way.
  - **You heed the warning, and you do something different.** That's the prudent, smart way to learn. If someone else has already made the mistake and suffered for it, then learn from their example. Profit from their past mistake. Don't repeat it. In **1 Corinthians 10**, Paul was recounting the story of Israel in the Wilderness and all their mistakes. And he says, in v11, "*Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction.*" **These stories were recorded and preserved for us. To serve as warnings for God's people today.**
  
- ❖ **This morning we're going to consider all four characters in this story and their particular mistakes.** And we'll talk about how they serve as warnings to us. As cautionary tales. But, at the same time, we're going to see how their story gives us a chance to deepen our grasp and appreciation of grace and the gospel.

## The Wrong Motives of Isaac

- ❖ Let's begin with Isaac. **He's an example of someone who ends up doing the right thing but with the wrong motives.** He ends up doing God's will but for the wrong reason. That's the lesson to be learned. Now, by this time, Isaac was at least one hundred years old. We learned in Genesis 25:26 that he was sixty when he and Rebekah had the twins.
  - Then, in Genesis 26:34, we learn that Esau was forty when he married his two Hittite wives. **That means Isaac is a centenarian with impaired vision.** Look at v1, "*When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son and said to him, "My son"; and he answered, "Here I am."*"
  
- ❖ **He planned to give his son his blessing.** That might not sound like a big deal to you. We talk today about giving children our blessing to marry that person or to make some other life-altering choice. But back in those days, a father's blessing was related to birthrights and inheritance. **And for this family in particular, the blessing had everything to do with God's blessing of Abraham back in Genesis 12.** Where God covenanted with Abraham and promised to bless his family to be a blessing to all the families of the earth.
  - He essentially told Abraham, "**I'm going to save the world from all the ruinous effects of sin through your family.** I'm going to bless you and your family with my presence, and with my Word, and teach you to live according to my ways. **And in every generation of your family, there will be a chosen one – a messianic seed – who will carry this Promise to the next generation.** And one day, at the end of this messianic line, there will appear a Savior, a Messiah, who will defeat sin, rescue sinners, and renew the whole earth." That's the Promise.
  
- ❖ In his generation, Isaac was that messianic seed – chosen over Ishmael and his other siblings. **And for the next generation, God had chosen Jacob over his twin brother Esau (25:23).** The younger over the older. That was made clear to Isaac and Rebekah through a prophecy.
  - But, in our text, Isaac apparently was planning to bless Esau over Jacob. **Now we were told outright that his eyes were bad, but there's no reason to assume that his memory was impaired.** That he simply forgot what the LORD had prophesied about the older serving the younger. No, I'm sure he remembered. Because I'm certain Rebekah wouldn't let him forget. **His memory wasn't the issue. It was his will. Issac didn't agree with the Lord's choice.** He still preferred his preference of Esau. He wanted his firstborn to receive the blessing.
    - It's revealing that Isaac's plan to bless Esau privately. Because typically such a thing was done publicly before other family members, so they can witness who receives the blessing. **Clearly, Isaac was trying to hide what he was about to do from his wife.** Perhaps even from God (if that were possible).
  
- ❖ His request for Esau to go hunt and prepare "*delicious food, such as I love,*" demonstrates how similar father and son are. **Both are creatures of desire. Driven by their appetites.** The Hebrew word for *love* that he uses in v4 is usually reserved for personal relationships. It stands out when the term is used for food. Isaac had a passionate desire for delicious food.

- ❖ **Similar to what we saw with Esau in chapter 25, Isaac was a man driven by sensuality. By his senses.** Notice how all five of our senses are referenced in this episode. Isaac may have lost the sense of sight, but he still retained the sense of touch (the goatskin), hearing (Jacob's voice), smell (Esau's garments), and taste (the delicious food).
- ❖ **But notice how he relied on his sense touch, smell, and taste but didn't rely on his sense of hearing.** Rebekah succeeded in masking Jacob's skin and smell and the taste of goat, passing it off as game. But she couldn't mask Jacob's voice. Isaac heard correctly. He accurately recognized the voice of his younger son, but he didn't heed his sense of hearing.
  - **And it's the sense of hearing that the Bible portrays as the primary sense for receiving God's truth.** Consider **Deuteronomy 4:12**. When Moses reminds God's people of their experience at Sinai when God came down. They didn't see him; didn't touch him; didn't smell him or taste him. They only heard him. *“Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice.”* They had to rely on their sense of hearing.
    - *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”* (Deut 6:4). Not *“See, O Israel.”* Not *“Touch, O Israel.”* God's people are to hear him. **We primarily receive God's truth through hearing.** And out of all five senses, Isaac's hearing was the only sense telling him the truth – and he didn't listen. **That demonstrates that Isaac's physical blindness was symbolic of a deeper underlying spiritual blindness.** He couldn't see the goodness and glory in God's ways – in God's will. Isaac still thought his plans were better.
- ❖ And yet the irony is that he still ends up doing God's will – but with the wrong motive. He ended up blessing Jacob. But his initial intent was to bless Esau. **Now it should be noted that, even after he discovered Jacob's deception, Isaac didn't rescind the blessing.** He didn't try to take it back. One could argue that's because, in their culture, such blessings (essentially promises) were considered irrevocable (cf. Jephthah's rash vow, Judg 11:30-35).
  - **But, at the same time, I think Isaac finally realized that he'd been kicking against the goads this entire time, trying to subvert God's will.** And now he finally accepts the fact that the prophecy about his two sons will come to pass. And that takes some faith. A reluctant faith – but it's still faith.
- ❖ That's why Isaac is still included in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11. **Hebrews 11:20** says, *“By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.”* He had faith. When Isaac invoked that blessing – that Promise that would one day lead to the Messiah – he truly believed in it. **He spoke with full assurance of faith in God's promise to bless the messianic line. He just thought he was passing it on to Esau.**
  - Again, that's the irony. **On one hand, he's a man of faith.** He believes. **But, on the other hand, he's a huge work-in-progress.** He struggles with submitting to God's plans and God's ways. He doesn't listen to God's Word. He doesn't rely on what he hears when God's Word is spoken.

- ❖ Do you see how relatable Isaac is? **How often do we, as people of faith, still struggle to rely on what we're hearing from God's Word as it's preached to us every week?** We might be good at doing the right things. But in our hearts, we wrestle with a mix of motives. It's not always pure. It's not always for the right reasons.
  - So Isaac is an example to learn from. Learn from his mistakes. Particularly his refusal to listen to God. Let's confess when we do the same. **When we struggle to submit to God's ways. Stop resisting and start accepting that his plans are higher and better than ours.** And be thankful that he's gracious to still work through us. Even as we struggle to want what he wants. To desire his desires. **Thank God that he doesn't require 100% pure motives before he's willing to work in and through us.**

### The Wrong Methods of Rebekah

- ❖ But even if we did share his desires and had the right motives, we still have to be careful to avoid the wrong methods. That was Rebekah's mistake. **If Isaac did the right thing but with the wrong motives, Rebekah was guilty of having the right motives but doing the wrong thing – adopting the wrong methods.** She was the mastermind behind this deception involving Jacob.
  - We're told in v5 that Rebekah overheard Isaac's conversation with Esau and immediately jumped into action. She instructs Jacob on how to carry out this plot. She alleviates his fears of getting caught and being cursed by his father instead of being blessed. She says in v13, *"Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice."*
    - So Rebekah is willing to take the curse upon herself. **This is the first – but definitely not the last – instance in Scripture of someone voluntarily offering to bear a curse on behalf of another.** But in this case, Rebekah is not an innocent, sacrificial lamb. She's in the wrong for plotting this way.
- ❖ Again, just like with Isaac, you see this tension where a biblical character exhibits genuine faith in God's promises but, at the same time, is deeply flawed. She's got the right motivation. She wants to see God's prophecy carried out – where the older will serve the younger. She desires for God's plan for Jacob to come to fruition. All of that is good.
  - **But the way she goes about it is wrong. And she ends up paying a price for her deception.** I'm not suggesting an eternal punishment. She did have faith in God's promises. But there are earthly consequences. **This is seen in the way that Rebekah basically disappears from the narrative after Genesis 27.** Unlike all the other matriarchs of the faith, there is no mention of her death in Genesis. Strangely, the text memorializes Deborah, Rebekah's nurse (35:8). It mentions Deborah's death but no mention of Rebekah's. That's revealing.
    - **That proves that – just as motives matter – so do your methods.** The ends don't justify the means. Just because you want to see God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven – that doesn't justify any means necessary.

- ❖ Friends, let's learn from Rebekah's example – from this warning against having the right motives but doing the wrong thing. Don't just settle for right intentions. **Don't pat yourself on the back because at least you wanted to do the right thing. The question is – what did you actually end up doing?** What choice did you actually make? And does it align with God's righteousness?
  - If we're willing to justify unrighteous means to obtain righteous ends, that just demonstrates a lack of faith. **You might believe God's promises and want to see them fulfilled. But do you believe in God's power to see it through?** Rebekah didn't trust that God would make a way for Jacob to receive the blessing. So she took matters into her own hands and got her hands dirty.
    - **But Scripture calls for clean hands and pure hearts (Ps 24:4).** The right motives at heart and the right methods to carry them out.

### The Deplorable Deception of Jacob

- ❖ Now let's turn our attention to Jacob. Sure, his mother was the mastermind, but he was the willing accomplice to carry out this plot. Let's consider the deplorable deception of Jacob. Now, at first, he seems hesitant to go along. **But notice how he's not so much concerned with the ethical nature of his mother's plot. He's more concerned with the risks and consequences.** He doesn't want to get caught and end up the object of his father's curse rather than blessing. Jacob is not concerned with the morality of the plan – just its feasibility.
  - But his mother convinces him to dress up in Esau's best garments (v15). And to cover up his exposed smooth skin – his hands and his neck – with goatskins (v16). That's because we're told in v11 that Esau was a hairy guy. Unlike Jacob. **So by v18, Jacob appears before his father, dressed up as Esau, in an attempt to steal his blessing.**
- ❖ Now we're told that Isaac is skeptical at first because he just sent Esau to go hunt game and prepare it the way he loves it. And he's back so soon? How did he do all of that so fast? Listen to v20, *“But Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?” He answered, “Because the LORD your God granted me success.”*
  - Wow. Not only did Jacob blatantly lie to his father's face saying, *“I am Esau your firstborn,”* (v19) now he's appealing to the LORD, saying he blessed the hunt. **Talk about taking God's name in vain.** Jacob has no fear of the LORD at this point.
    - And notice how he's says, *“Because the LORD your God granted me success.”* **The LORD is not Jacob's God.** Father, he's *your* God. That's how Jacob spoke of the LORD at this point in his story. It won't be until after he returns home; after his twenty-year sojourn; after he wrestles with God; after he experiences God's severe mercy; only then is the LORD his God.
- ❖ Those are all events to come in Jacob's story. **But, at this point, he's so desperate to secure his father's blessing that he'll resort to deplorable deception to get what he wants.** He'll shamelessly take the LORD's name in vain if that's what it takes. He's so badly wants his father's blessing and all that it entails.

- ❖ And look at vv28-29 to see what the blessing entails. *“May God give you of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine.”* **Isaac is blessing him with fruitfulness.** With agricultural fertility. With plenty of rain and plenty of grain. And then look at v29, *“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!”*
  - **So in addition to being promised rain, Jacob is promised to one day reign over his brothers.** Peoples will serve you and bow down to you. Whoever curses you will be cursed and whoever blesses you will be blessed (cf. Num 24:9). That’s the blessing. That’s what Jacob is after.
    - Not only is he desperate for his father’s **love** and **affirmation**, Jacob wants the **wealth** and **prosperity** that comes with that blessing. As well as the **significance** that comes with being the head of the family. And the longterm **security** that comes with that **status**.
- ❖ But as his story progresses in the following chapters, it’s apparent that none of these blessings are going to satisfy. Even after securing the blessing of his father, he comes to realize that the one thing he lacked – the one thing that truly matters and truly satisfies – is the blessing of God. **It won’t be until the end of chapter 32, when he wrestles with God himself, that Jacob finally realizes that what he ultimately needs is for God to bless him.** And he won’t let go until God does (32:26).
- ❖ **Let’s not make the same mistake. Jacob made his mistakes and suffered for them.** So let’s learn the smart way; not the hard way. Recognize that his deception comes back to bite him in chapter 31. He impersonates Esau *now*, but *later* Jacob will be deceived when Laban has Leah impersonate Rachel. **The point is to heed the consequences.** To learn from the folly of others who are desperate for earthly blessings while overlooking eternal ones.
  - Like Jacob, we can be so caught up in trying to secure the blessings of **love** and **affirmation** from our parents or from a romantic partner. We’re so busy chasing after the blessings of **wealth** and **prosperity**. We long for **significance** and **status** and the **security** that it brings. But all the while, overlooking the most important blessing – to seek **the face of God**. To have his face shine upon us in blessing.
- ❖ **Jacob took the long and hard path to finally come to that realization.** Friends, there’s no need to take the same path – to go and see for yourself. Be prudent. Be smart. **Learn from the mistakes of others. And take the direct path to true blessing.** Seek first the face of God. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Mt 6:33).

### The Bitter Regret of Esau

- ❖ Let’s conclude with a consideration of Esau and his bitter regret. He re-enters the scene in v30. We’re told that he returns with game deliciously prepared for his father, and that Jacob had *“scarcely gone out”* when Esau returned. He nearly caught his little brother in the act.

- ❖ **Now we're told that both Isaac and Esau are extremely distressed when they discover they've been deceived.** It says in v33 that Isaac “*trembled very violently,*” which implies anger not fear. And in v34, Esau “*cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry.*”
  - He begs for a blessing. For whatever's left. But Isaac tells him that Jacob took everything. He has no blessing left for Esau. Instead, in vv39-40, he invokes a counter-blessing. An anti-blessing. **You could call it a curse. He's denied everything that Jacob is promised.**
  
- ❖ Without the fruitfulness of the land, Esau will be consigned to live like the hunter he's been portrayed to be. “*By the sword you shall live.*” **But you and your kin will end up serving your brother Jacob and his chosen line.** But at least Esau is promised, at the end of v40, that one day his descendants will throw off the yoke of Jacob (cf. 2 Kg 8:20-22).
  - But the point is that no matter how distraught Esau might have felt – no matter how much he might have regretted his decisions – **no amount of tears was going to change the outcome.** He had sold his birthright. He lost out on the blessing. And all the tears in the world won't change that fact.
  
- ❖ **In the book of Hebrews, in chapter 12:15-17, the author uses Esau as an example for us.** As a cautionary tale to warn us. To not allow bitterness to overtake you. He says see to it that no one is like “*Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. <sup>17</sup>For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.*” **I take that to mean he sought the blessing with tears.** But no amount of tears could change the outcome.
  - Now you might feel bad for Esau, but he's no innocent victim. **He chose to trade away eternal blessings in order to satisfy temporary appetites.** And even though he clearly regrets selling away his birthright and losing his father's blessing, the point is that he's still not repentant.
  
- ❖ **There's a difference between regret and repentance.** Tears of regret are not the same as tears of repentance. You see, tears of regret are shed merely over the consequences of sin. But genuine repentance (whether there are tears or not) is directed towards God – the One whom we have ultimately sinned against. **Repentance is not about turning away from the consequences of sin, trying to avoid them. It's about turning your back on sin itself and turning your contrite face towards the God of mercy.** That's repentance.
  - My point is that there will be lots of tears shed in the courtroom of God come Judgement Day. Lots of regret. But no amount of tears can save you. **The only thing that can save you is repentance and faith in the only One who can save – the Firstborn of Heaven, Jesus Christ, our Lord.**
  
- ❖ In Hebrews 12, the author goes on in v23 to describe the Church – all the Redeemed in Christ – calling us “*the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.*” We are the Church of the Firstborn. **All of us in the family of God are firstborns.** Which makes no sense at first.

- ❖ **How can we all be firstborns?** I can understand calling us the Church of the Children of God. Because the gospel teaches that sinners like us can be adopted as children in the family of God. And by faith we believe. But because of our ongoing struggle with indwelling sin, most of us assume we're pretty low on the totem pole in the family of God. **We feel like one of the youngest, one of the last of all the heirs of heaven.** We're just glad to be in the room.
  - But this is where the gospel is so good. **The good news of the gospel is that, in heaven, all of us are firstborns. We're all firstborn children because the Firstborn of Heaven willingly gave his inheritance equally to us all.**
  
- ❖ Jesus came down to live the life we should have lived. He dressed up in our garments. **But unlike Jacob, Jesus dressed up as us – not to steal our blessing – but to bear our curse.** To embrace our cross. He lost his firstborn status. He died and carried our curse to the grave. **So that we, who believe in him, might be blessed as firstborns in the kingdom of heaven.** That we might share in his inheritance – becoming the Church of the Firstborn.
  - Friends, the biggest lesson to be learned from the example of these characters in this story is that we're no different. Our lives are just as messy. Our choices are just as self-serving and short-sighted. **But their meager faith, their shaky faith, their reluctant faith in the Promise of God, pointing to the Messiah, the Savior of the World – that was enough to save them.** And it's enough to save you.