

FATHERHOOD – Part Five
-ISAAC AND HIS SONS-
“A FATHER’S BLESSING”
Sermon 8/18/19

For the past three weeks we have talked about Adam, Abraham and Noah and the fatherly influence they had on their sons. This week I want to look at Isaac. Isaac was the son of Abraham who remained in the home while his stepbrother Ishmael was sent away without an inheritance. Isaac’s two sons were named Esau and Jacob. Their mother’s name was Rebekah. These two struggled so much when in her womb that she asked the Lord about it. He said to her,

GENESIS 25:23

“Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples will be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger.”

When the older came forth from the womb the Scriptures say he was “red all over like a hairy garment”. They named him Esau because the name Esau means “red”. The younger came forth with his hand holding on to his brother’s heel, so they named him Jacob. The name Jacob means “one who takes by the heel or supplants”. The Scriptures say, *“When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents.”* The Scriptures then reveal the dichotomy that existed within the household of Isaac and Rebekah.

GENESIS 25:28

“Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.”

Isaac had two sons - Jacob the tent dweller and Esau the outdoorsman. The tent dweller was loved by his mother Rebekah and the outdoorsman was loved by his father Isaac. Two parents with two different favorites. As his father’s favorite Esau felt secure in his father’s love. Though Jacob was his mother’s favorite, he could not do the things that brought delight to his father as his brother Esau could. Because of this, Jacob was constantly looking for opportunities that would allow him to receive the same favor from his father as his brother Esau.

According to Scripture, the biggest events in these two brothers’ lives revolved around food. The first incident records the cavalier attitude of Esau regarding his birthright. The second reveals the deception which was common in the family line of both their grandfathers and their uncle. We read about the first in Genesis chapter 25.

GENESIS 25:29-34

“When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; and Esau said to Jacob, ‘Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished’ ... But Jacob said, ‘First sell me your birthright.’ Esau said, ‘Behold I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?’

“And Jacob said, ‘First swear to me; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.’

To despise something is to regard it with contempt or disdain and to consider it useless. It is unknown why Esau thought so little of his birthright. Was it because he was so certain of his father's love that he did not need the birthright? People who live together say marriage is just a piece of paper. As long as two people are committed to each other what difference does a piece of paper make? Perhaps Esau felt similarly. He had his father's love. What difference would an official "birthright" make? The Scriptures do not reveal Esau's true motivation. But whatever the reason one thing is clear. Esau despised his birthright enough to trade it for one bowl of soup. That's how little he valued it.

Jacob, on the other hand, placed great value in his brother's birthright, and was willing to deprive his brother of the firstborn's portion of his inheritance in order to get it for himself. Well aware of Esau's tendency to be ruled by his stomach, Jacob took advantage of Esau's hunger. After making a stew which he knew Esau could not resist he made sure it was ready before Esau returned from the fields. Esau may have been cavalier about selling his birthright, but Jacob was well aware of what he was doing. Esau's decision was spur-of-the-moment. Jacob's was done with premeditated intent.

The second incident involving food was when their father was old and his eyes too dim to see. Isaac called for his son Esau, asked him to hunt for game, prepare the kind of savory dish that he loved, and then bring it to him so he could bless him before he died. His wife Rebekah overheard the conversation and decided to intervene so that her favorite son and not her husband's would be the one to receive the blessing.

Rebekah convinced Jacob to bring her two young goats so that she could prepare the kind of savory dish that her husband loved. She then told Jacob that he should bring the meal to his father so that he might be the one who was blessed. Though Jacob did not refuse his mother's request, he was concerned that even with his poor eyesight his father would recognize he was not his brother. Esau was a hairy man and Jacob was smooth skinned. If his father touched him he would know he was not Esau. This would bring a curse upon himself instead of a blessing.

But his mother said "*Your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go.*" Rebekah then took Esau's best garments which were with her in the house and put them on Jacob. She also put the skins of the young goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. Then she gave the savory food and the bread she had made to Jacob to take to his father Isaac. Genesis 27 picks up the story.

GENESIS 27:18-29

The (Jacob) came to his father and said, 'My father,' And he said, 'Here I am. Who are you, my son? Jacob said to his father. 'I am Esau your firstborn; I have done as you told me. Get up please, sit and eat of my game, that you may bless me.'

"Isaac said to his son, 'How is it that you have it so quickly, my son?' And he said, 'Because the Lord your God caused it to happen to me.' Then Isaac said to Jacob, 'Please come close, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not.'

"So Jacob came close to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, 'The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.' He did not recognize him because his hands were hairy like

his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him.

“And he said, ‘Are you really my son, Esau?’ And he said, ‘I am,’ So he said, ‘Bring it to me, and I will eat of my son's game, that I may bless you.’ And he brought it to him, and he ate’; he also brought him wine and he drank. Then his father Isaac said to him, ‘Please come close and kiss me, my son.’ So he came close and kissed him; and when he smelled the smell of his garments, he blessed him, and said,

“‘See, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed; Now may God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and an abundance of grain and new wine; May peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you; Be master of your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be those who curse you, and blessed be those who bless you.’”

I'm sure Jacob was a little nervous at first trying to pull off this deception. But his heart must have skipped a beat when his father asked him to come closer so that he might touch and smell him. With a trembling heart Jacob moved closer to his father hoping the plot would not unravel. Luckily the ends to which his mother went to deceive his father worked. After touching the skins his mother had wrapped on his hands and neck and smelling the clothing he had borrowed from his brother Esau, Isaac was finally convinced that Esau was standing before him; and so, oblivious to the deception, Isaac unintentionally gave Jacob the blessing he had intended for Esau.

Esau, of course, was unaware of any of this because he was out hunting game, just as his father had requested. And in one of those Hollywood suspense moments, Jacob has barely left the tent of his father Isaac when Esau comes in from his hunt. While Jacob hurries to change his clothes, Esau prepares his father's savory dish, brings it to him and says, *“Let my father arise and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me.”* That was the moment when, as they say, “the jig was up.” Everything that had been done to Isaac, all the deception and trickery by both his son and his wife, was instantly uncovered.

Isaac trembled violently when he realized what had happened. He was angry with his son and angry with himself for being so deceived. But Esau was heartbroken.

GENESIS 27:34-38

“When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, ‘Bless me, even me also, O my father!’ And he said, ‘Your brother came deceitfully and has taken away your blessing.’ Then he said, ‘Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.’

“And he said, ‘Have you not reserved a blessing for me?’ But Isaac replied to Esau, ‘Behold, I have made him your master, and all his relatives I have given to him as servants; and with grain and new wine I have sustained him. Now as for you then, what can I do, my son?’ Esau said to his father, ‘Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, my father.’ So Esau lifted his voice and wept.”

Esau cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, lifted his voice and wept because he did not receive his father's blessing. We see none of this emotion when he traded away his birthright for a bowl of stew. Esau appears to have placed more value on his father's blessing than he did on his inheritance. It was not enough to be his father's favorite, nor did he care for the material things he might inherit. What he desperately wanted above all else was his father's blessing. And he had just been robbed of that by his deceitful brother. This loss was so great that he cried bitter tears and begged his father for something, anything that would resemble a blessing for him.

GENESIS 27:39-40

“Then Isaac his father answered and said, ‘Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, and away from the dew of heaven from above. By your sword you shall live, and your brother you shall serve; but it shall come about when you become restless, that you will break his yoke from your neck.’”

This was hardly a blessing. It was more like a declaration of what life would be like for Esau since Isaac had given his son Jacob a great blessing with no room for Esau. Yet he did give Esau some hope that there would come a point in time when he grew tired of serving his brother and would finally break that yoke from around his neck.

From that day forward Esau bore a grudge against his brother and said to himself, *“The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob”* (Genesis 27:41). Through deception Esau may have traded away his birthright and been cheated out of his blessing, but he would not stand for any more trickery. He would get rid of his deceiving brother once and for all. He would fulfill his father's words. He would break his brother's yoke from off his neck just as soon as his father was dead and buried. This would then make him the sole beneficiary of his father's estate. As such, he would inherit Jacob's undeserved blessing and would also regain the birthright he had so flippantly sold.

So, what is it about a father's blessing that is so important and so disappointing when it is not received? I am not an expert in this area because I did not receive my father's blessing, nor did I receive a portion of my father's inheritance. Yet sometimes we come to understand things better from a negative perspective than from a positive one. From this story, and from my own experience, I can tell you that there is a difference between a monetary inheritance and a blessing. A father's monetary inheritance is not valued as much to his son as is his blessing. My father believed he was punishing me when he withheld my share of his estate. But I knew I had far greater riches awaiting me in heaven so it did not have nearly the impact he thought it would. However, I did feel the impact of not receiving his blessing.

So, what's the difference between an inheritance and a blessing? An inheritance is the passing on of material goods. It is given as a means of providing financial security. It connects the worldly possessions of one generation with another. A father's blessing is not material. It connects the heart of the father to the heart of his child. It is something that is intended to have a positive influence on their child throughout their life. It is the foundational basis for everything else the child does in life.

A child who receives the blessing is secure. A child who does not seek to fill the void that was created when the blessing was withheld and will spend their energies looking for that blessing

from anyone and anything they can in an endless search to fill the void in their heart. Anyone who says they are “worth something” or that they “did a good job” or who recognizes their skills or talents will be the one to whom the searching child pays heed.

A child’s heart aches to hear good things spoken about them. That is why a teacher, mentor, or youth leader can make such an impact on those whose homes lack the affirming words of a father. But it is also why some are so easily led astray by those who use flattering words to coerce children into doing things they would otherwise not do. The lack of a father’s blessing drives them to look for a place of belonging where they feel loved and cared for. These may only be temporary places, but for a moment in time the pain from what they did not receive at home recedes a little, and the hope of finding a secure place for their heart to dwell is briefly satisfied.

When I speak of a father’s blessing I am speaking certainly of the final words of affirmation from a dying father. But I am also speaking of a lifetime of words which affirm the value and respect a father has for his child. There are three things which some have said children need to hear from their fathers.

I LOVE YOU
I’M PROUD OF YOU
I BELIEVE IN YOU

The first expression grounds children in the security of their father’s love so that they can move beyond the foundational need for acceptance. The second affirms the first. Children whose fathers are proud of them and their accomplishments are children who do not need to seek elsewhere for approval. They stand firmly on their father’s endorsement and appreciation, able to go out into the world full of confidence.

When children know they are loved and are told that what they do and who they are makes their father proud, then the words “I believe in you” also take on a significant meaning. When they attempt to do things, they are not doing so in a search for love or recognition for they have already received these things from their father. What they do from this foundation of love and acceptance is typically beyond what they would ordinarily do. When they go out into the world they are not stuck in the starting position in the race of life. They are far ahead of others who lack this security. They are able to leap from a point of self-assurance and propel themselves to newer and greater heights.

A mother’s love and nurture is extremely important. No child can grow up healthy and whole without it. But the blessing of the father upon a son’s life cannot be underestimated. A son struggles to feel like a man when his father is too busy to notice his accomplishments. And all too often carries that insecurity with him throughout his life.

Esau knew he was loved by his father yet wept bitter tears when he did not receive his father’s blessing. Jacob knew he was loved by his mother, but that was not enough. He wanted the blessing of his father as well and sought after it through deception. What happened to these two brothers? Jacob was sent away by his father and mother to keep him from Esau’s revenge but also to find a wife in the land of Canaan among his relatives.

In the intervening years Jacob became the father of twelve sons who eventually became the 12 tribes of Israel. As for Esau, he married several foreign wives, including Basemath, the daughter of his uncle Ishmael. Jacob eventually returned to his native land and met up with his brother Esau. About twenty years had passed since they last saw each other. By this time Esau had garnered enough wealth for himself that he had no need of the gifts Jacob offered to placate him upon his return from the land of Canaan. On the surface it appears that the need for revenge had died over the long years of absence from one another and that these brothers were now on friendly terms.

Two nations were indeed formed from these two brothers, just as God proclaimed to Rebekah when they were still in her womb. Jacob, now called Israel, remained in the land of Canaan until his son Joseph called for him to come to Egypt. Esau eventually moved to the hill country of Seir, which is east of the Jordan River, because their combined livestock had become too great and the land could not sustain them both.

Esau became the father of the Edomites who lived in the land of Edom. Edom was one of the nations which refused to allow Israel to go through their land on their way to Canaan. The land of Edom became a pagan nation whose people worshipped idols. Edom was eventually conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, as had the nation of Israel earlier. The Jews returned to their homeland after the exile and began to return to the Lord, but the descendants of Esau never did. Their land is currently controlled by Jordan. Jacob's future devotion and Esau's future rejection of their father's God may be why God said of these two brothers before their birth, "*Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.*" (Romans 9:13). Jacob's family remained true to the Lord, but Esau's did not.

We have looked at Jacob and Esau but what of Isaac? How did this product of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah handle his two very different sons? Esau gave up his firstborn rights to his brother Jacob for one bowl of stew. Yet we read nothing of Isaac's intervention or any attempt by him to right this wrong. Though there was anger over the deception we do not see any consequences coming from Isaac toward Jacob for pretending to be Esau in order to receive his blessing. Isaac seems to have accepted the deception as though he could do nothing about it.

What kind of father allows his son to rob his older brother of his firstborn rights of inheritance with no consequences? What kind of father sits back and does nothing when his younger son takes his older brother's blessing by deception? Perhaps it a father whose guilt and personal history caused him to overlook what he should not have overlooked. Isaac himself was the product of a younger son receiving the older son's inheritance and blessing. He understood the pain which caused some to do desperate things in order to gain their father's affection. He witnessed the desperation of his stepbrother Ishmael who sought after his father's affection and did not receive it. Perhaps that is why he determined not to withhold that same affection to his sons no matter what they had done. He also had to know that his wife had a hand in the deception; and that would have complicated any attempt to discipline his son Jacob.

With few exceptions, children, even with their imperfections, their family history, and personal temperaments, start out life loving their fathers and fathers start out loving their children. But time, age, work, and the struggles of both childhood and adulthood can take a toll on the "what should be's" until only the "what need be's" are done. The priorities of love and care can take second place to the tyranny of the urgent. Fathers can spend all their time keeping food on the table, a roof over their

children's heads, and their kids clothed, all the while prioritizing the material over the emotional and spiritual well-being of their families. When this occurs, children become desperate for their father's blessing because the personal connection is being withheld from them.

Most of us here have grown children, some of them married with children and even grandchildren of their own. But it is not too late to bless our children. The influence of a father is never done. Even after death his influence continues. Better to make that influence a healthy one than one which was overcome by the cares of the world. As long as his child has breath and the father still lives he can bless his child with these three statements of affirmation:

I LOVE YOU
I'M PROUD OF YOU
I BELIEVE IN YOU

I believe that when a son or a daughter hears these words from their father it will make a difference in even the most hardened relationships. If these things have never been said it may be hard to start. But start you must. Even if it has been said before it is worth repeating. A son or a daughter never gets tired of hearing encouraging words from their father. (And mothers I won't leave you out. Daughters also need to hear encouraging words from their mothers.)

Even if we ourselves have not received our earthly father's blessing we can receive one from our heavenly Father who, according to Isaiah 30:18 *"longs to be gracious to us and waits on high to have compassion on us."* Jesus said, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5). The Father says, *"I have loved you with an everlasting love"* (Jeremiah 31:3). The Spirit comforts us in our weakness and seals us as His for all eternity. We may have been robbed of our earthly father's blessing, but we have, by faith, been given the opportunity to receive God's personal blessing.

If you have received a blessing from your earthly father, you know the comfort and security his blessing brought to you. If you are one of the many fathers whose earthly father did not say those words of affirmation, the void he left behind can be filled by the God who loves and cares for you. You don't have to live in the past seeking after something you may never receive. You can look forward, alive in the present, knowing the blessing of God's sacrificial love for you. All it takes is a heart willing to receive what God has already provided. The Scripture tells us that *"God so loved the world that He gave..."* He is still giving today. All we need do is receive that love.

SPIRIT SONG (Key of D)

O let the Son of God enfold you with His Spirit and His love,
Let Him fill your life and satisfy your soul.
O let Him have the things that hold you and His Spirit, like a dove,
Will descend upon your life and make you whole.

Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill Your lambs
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill. Your lambs

O come and sing this song of gladness as your hearts are filled with joy,
Lift your hands in sweet sur-render to His name.

O give Him all your tears and sadness, give Him all your years of pain
And you'll enter into life in Jesus' name.

Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill Your lambs
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill. Your lambs

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