

Abounding Grace to the Chief of Twisters

Genesis 27:1-34

By [David Felker](#)

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 27. Genesis chapter 27. It begins on page 21 in the church Bible. And before we read, something to consider. This passage we are about to read, it may feel very distant from us. This is a strange passage. Someone after the eight-thirty service said, "That was a strange passage for Thanksgiving week." It's a strange passage, but it is a sad story of someone who is desperate and deeply flawed and very uncomfortable with himself and his place in this world. And so he tries to build an image of himself as someone else because he thinks, "If I can be someone else, then I will find real blessing, then I will find real life."

I think if we were honest, all of us at some level have a "Jacob" in our heart. The truth of the matter, whether we admit it or not, is that the characters here in Genesis 27 are very much like ourselves. A few years ago, one of my favorite preachers, Sinclair Ferguson, preached a sermon series on the life of Jacob and it was entitled, "Abounding Grace to the Chief of Twisters." "Abounding Grace to the Chief of Twisters." And the story of Jacob's life, in many ways, is the story of how God untwisted the twisted. And that's what we find here in our passage. Jacob is a twister. He is a scoundrel. He is a mess. His heart character is very unattractive, and yet it should be a great encouragement to you this morning that Jacob is in the Bible. Psalm 46 says this, and this is an echo in Scripture, a joyful glorious celebration, celebrating our great God and His grace to us and His care for us, the psalmist writes, "The God of Jacob is our refuge. The God of Jacob is our refuge. The God of Jacob is our fortress." And so with that in mind, let's jump in. Before we do let's look to the Lord in prayer. Let's pray.

Our great God and Heavenly Father, we ask that You would help us this morning. Your Word is more precious than gold and sweeter than honey. It is also living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. And so enable us both to taste of the sweetness of Your Word, that it would be a balm to weary souls, and may it also break through and bring conviction of sin, causing us to run to Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep in whose name we pray. Amen.

Genesis chapter 27, beginning in verse 1:

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 said, "Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me, and prepare for me delicious food, such as I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die."

Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, 'Bring me game and prepare for me delicious food, that I may eat it and bless you before the Lord before I die.' Now therefore, my son, obey my voice as I command you. Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, so that I may prepare from them delicious food for your father, such as he loves. And you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies." But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing." His mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, bring them to me."

So he went and took them and brought them to his mother, and his mother prepared delicious food, such as his father loved. Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her older son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. And the skins of the young goats she put on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. And she put the delicious food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

So he went in 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; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me." 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." Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not." So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands. So he blessed him. He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "I am." Then he said, "Bring it near to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you." So he brought it near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank.

Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son." So he came near and kissed him. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said,

"See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed! 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!"

As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting. He also prepared delicious food and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father arise and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me." His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau." Then Isaac trembled very violently and said, "Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed." As soon as 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!"

This is God's Word.

The Saddest Family Story in Genesis

A big conversation that you have to have as a young family, I would say a macro-level conversation, is, "Are we going to do the family Christmas card or are we going to do the family Christmas letter?" And this past week we answered that question. My wife spent time here and there working on our family Christmas card. That is our team. We are the Christmas card people. And I wonder if, over the years around this time of year, you receive cards and letters from friends both near and far and I'll bet if you do you have almost certainly year after year had at least one of those letters come from "the perfect family," kind of the great, wonderful, unblemished family. And not just they give, they don't just give the news that you need to know, the information that you really need to know, but they'll tell you about how every detail could not be more wonderful. And my mom, years ago on the heels of reading one of those letters, joked, "Next year is the year! Next year is the year! We're going to write the dreadfully honest, all the cards on the table, this is who we are, take it or leave it, the imperfect Felker family Christmas letter!"

I think of that funny and facetious statement by my mom when I read this account of the household of Isaac. I wonder if they were honest what would be said in this family's holiday letter. We are, in this section of Scripture, we are continually underwhelmed by this family. This story is a sad story. There's maybe no more ugly episode in Genesis than Jacob's deception here in Genesis 27. And to be

fair, it's the sad story of four people - of Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob and Esau. And they all come out looking ugly. And you read this passage and the million dollar question is, "How could this be the family that God was at work through and through which the blessing of the Messiah was promised to come?" And it's here that we see the faithfulness of God because the only explanation for how this family could nevertheless be a family in which God was working is that God is a God of great grace.

The most frequently used word in this passage is the word, "blessing." Everything centers around this blessing, and so we're going to look at three things in this text. The first is the search for the blessing, second, the deceitful maneuver for the blessing, and then third, the way of true blessing.

I. The Search for the Blessing

And so first, the search for blessing. The search for blessing or the struggle for blessing really is the story of Jacob's life. If you want to turn a page or two to Genesis chapter 32, this is the climax of his life. It's the weird, famous scene in the middle of the night when he wrestles with this angel of the Lord and look what he says in verse 26. Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." Now as we look at our text, we note several interesting things right out of the gate. Note, first of all, verse 1, Isaac was old. Most commentators mention that the narrators notes that all five of Isaac's senses were fallible or failing him. He's blind, verse 1; verse 25, his taste. Verse 27, his touch; verse 27, his smell. They're all mentioned but are deceiving him. And his hearing in verse 22 is uncertain. And he's about to die. And in verses 1 to 4 he puts a plan in place to pass on this blessing that God had given to his father, Abraham, in Genesis 12. And Abraham passed on the blessing to Isaac in Genesis 26. And Isaac now wants to pass on this blessing to his favorite, his firstborn, Esau. This is in spite of the oracle given when Esau and Jacob were born where God said that the older, Esau, will serve the younger, Jacob. But Isaac loved Esau and so he planned this transaction, notice, to be done in secret. No witnesses, no family; it's a secret. And you see, Isaac loved Esau and he let that love blind him, blind him to what God had said. God had said, "Jacob have I loved," and Isaac said, "But Esau have I loved." And so he was blind. He chooses to act against the Word of God, against the revealed will of God. Isaac is going to oppose God's Word with all of his might.

And that may be where you're at this morning. You're at a fork in the road and you know what God has said, but you know what your heart wants. And Isaac trusted his heart. He followed his heart; he pursued his heart's desire instead of the Word of God. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us, "the heart is deceitful; it is deceitful above all things." Proverbs 28:26 says, "A fool trusts in his own heart."

Formal Ways, Powerful Words

And this blessing, notice, it was a very formal thing. Look at verse 4. Isaac says, “so that my soul may bless you.” So his heart was engaged, his soul was engaged. This was very significant. This great blessing, this firstborn blessing, a transfer from father to son of all that the father was that would be given to the son. One commentator said, “Fundamental to the whole story of Genesis 27 is the conviction of the efficacy of the deathbed blessing. What the patriarch says before he dies determines the destiny of his descendants.” And the commentator points to Genesis 48 and 49 and he says, “Genesis sees the deathbed blessing as more than a prayer for the future but as a prophecy whose fulfillment is certain.” And that’s why Rebekah is so desperate to make sure that Jacob gets the blessing before Esau. And that’s why, I mean a big question of this passage is, “Why couldn’t Isaac just call everyone back? Call them back in and redo it?” Isaac says in verse 33, he declares he can’t take back the blessing. He says, “Indeed, Jacob has been blessed.” Esau, verse 34, pleads for Isaac to find some blessing for him. John Calvin says that, “The benediction here spoken of was not a mere prayer but a legitimate sanction divinely interposed to make manifest the grace of election God has promised.” And so Isaac would say, “This is who you are,” and it enabled Jacob to be who he was declared to be. They’re powerful words.

And we know, we know words are powerful, that words of even offhanded comments over the years, words of affirmation and blessing or words of condemnation and criticism and cursing, they move into you and they shape who you are. How much more in Genesis 27, words that are put forth by the chosen patriarch of God in an authoritative climactic setting like a deathbed blessing from a father to a son? Isaac, here, is not giving a pep talk; he’s giving a benediction. He is giving a benediction. He is using powerful words to empower Jacob to be who he is to become. He was making Jacob somebody. And that’s the first thing - the search for blessing.

II. The Deceitful Maneuver for the Blessing

The second thing I want you to see is the deceitful maneuver for the blessing. In an interesting but sad way, the narrator mentions that Isaac calls Esau, verse 1, “my son.” But look at verse 8. Rebekah calls Jacob, notably, “my son.” Esau, we know this, was Isaac’s favorite. Esau received the smile of his father, the favor of his father. Jacob didn’t have it. He was a second-rate child and there was a deep emptiness that followed him all of his life. We’re told in Genesis 25 verse 27 that when the boys grew up, “Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in the tents. Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game and Rebekah loved Jacob.” And so what’s gone wrong?

A Spiritual Problem

Many of you know this, my dad has been a college football coach for almost forty years and my dad's dad, my granddad, was a high school football coach in west Tennessee for all of his adult life. And so I think it's fair to say that we are a football family. A few weeks ago, I took my wife and my seven month old son, Marshall, and we went to visit my parents and that morning I was laying on the ground and I was playing with Marshall, multitasking while watching the game, and Marshall all of a sudden looks up, and for more than a few moments he starts to watch the game. And it was a Big Ten football game so he couldn't watch for too long, but my thinking was, "This must be a sign from the Lord. Marshall will follow in his family's footsteps. He will love football. He will play football. Maybe he will coach football." Marshall may not like football and that's going to be okay. You have to see that what's going on in this family is much more serious. It wasn't just that the boys were different. It wasn't about family traditions. It wasn't about hobbies. It wasn't just that Jacob liked cooking and Esau liked hunting. There was something more going on at the heart level. Listen to what Sinclair Ferguson said. "There was something going on in the parents that was spiritually twisted and it becomes evident, as it always does, that the children were breathing in the spiritual atmosphere that their parents were breathing out." Listen to that. Sons and daughters tend to breathe in the atmosphere that their parents have breathed out. And so neither of the boys were saying, "Dad, Mom, how can I give myself absolutely, unreservedly to the Lord?" You see, it was a spiritual problem.

What can we say about Rebekah? Chapter 24 tells us that Rebekah was very attractive in appearance. And she may still be very attractive in appearance but she's becoming more and more unlovely on the inside. The real problem is a spiritual problem. Rebekah's failure was spiritual. She was right in clinging to the promise of God that "the older will serve the younger," but she deceived her husband. She had a promise from God and she didn't trust God's Word. There's no record of Rebekah going to the Lord in prayer. There's no record of her approaching God. She doesn't go the way of faith, which is a great lesson for us. When we stop trusting God's Word we're prone to manipulate the people around us, even to the point of manipulating our children. Rebekah did what was right in her eyes. She took matters into her own hands. Proverbs 3 says, "Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones." And so we read in verse 5 that Rebekah overhears Isaac's plan; she sets in motion a counterplan to steal the blessing.

Most commentators suggest that Isaac, excuse me, that Jacob is as young as forty and as old as seventy-five. This is not a small child and he doesn't have the maturity, he doesn't have the courage, he doesn't have the spiritual character to say to his parents, "No! I honor you, I love you, but no. We will trust what God says." And so you see what happens. She goes to Jacob, she dresses him up as Esau, puts Esau's clothes on him so that he will smell like Esau, puts goatskin on his hands and neck so that he's hairy like Esau, and not only does Jacob go along with it, look at verse 20. He adds to it by lying to his father and even

dragging the name of God into his deception. Isaac asked him in verse 20, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" And listen to Jacob's words. He says, "Because the Lord your God granted me success."

The Deceitfulness of Sin

That's a lesson to us about the deceitfulness of sin. That when we go down the road to sin, when we follow our heart, when we trust our heart, when we go down the road to sin, it's not just that particular sin that we will commit. Sin is deceitful. It's not just that particular sin that we will commit. We will go after whatever it takes, whatever is necessary, whatever other sin we must commit to get our heart's desire. And the sad part of this passage is that when you seek to secure God's blessing through your manipulation and through your hands, through your own efforts and your self-works, it always ends on a black note. Numbers 32:23 - "You may be sure that your sin will find you out." This family is ripped apart in the end. Sin is not a small matter. It has great consequences here and now. I mean, look at all of them at the end. Esau's heart stores up anger against Jacob. Verse 41 tells us that he becomes so bitter that he plots fratricide. He plots to kill his brother. Esau married into false gods. There's no record in Scripture of Esau ever repenting or ever coming to faith. Okay, Jacob will find his victory bittersweet. He has to flee his homeland. He leaves poor and destitute. Rebekah, as far as you can read in the rest of Genesis, she never sees her son that she loves again. She never sees Jacob again. Notice the saddest thing in verse 46 of this passage. The saddest thing, the only time in this passage that husband and wife, that Isaac and Rebekah actually speak to one another, is when it's too late. And the tragedy of this family is that with all of their manipulation to get their hearts' desire, it all ends on a black note. Psalm 106 - "God gave his people what they wanted but with it they experienced a wasting disease." Look at this family. Look at them. There's sin, there's hurt, there's deception, there's brokenness. This family's a wreck. And that's the second thing - the deceitful maneuver for the blessing. You may be thinking, "This is a pick-me-up Thanksgiving week sermon."

III. The Way of True Blessing

The third point, briefly. What is the way, then, to blessing? This is a somber and distasteful episode but there is a spot here that stands out so brightly and it's in verse 33. When Isaac realizes what's happened, we read that "Isaac trembled very violently and said, 'Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me?'" So it's starting to dawn on him that it wasn't [Esau]. And he says, "I ate of it all before you came and I have blessed him." And then look at this. He says, "Yes, and he shall be blessed." Notice what it says at the very beginning of verse 33 - that Isaac trembled. Remember what is said later on in the Scripture, God says in Isaiah 66, "This is the man after my heart to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and who trembles at my word." Derek Kidner says,

“Isaac has been fighting against God and he now accepts defeat.” James Montgomery Boice says this is the conversion of Isaac. This is what Boice says. “Some may think conversion too strong a word for one who had undoubtedly been raised in the love and knowledge of God, but I do not think it is too strong. And even if it was not a conversion in the sense of Isaac being changed from an unsaved condition to a saved one, it was at least a conversion from a willful rejection of the sovereign decree of God to an obedient acceptance of it.” I think this is why, later on, in the hall of faith, Hebrews 11, the writer says this, “By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.” That Isaac realizes here “Jacob was a twister. He was a deceiver. He was a fraud. He tricked me. But at the end of the day, Jacob will be blessed.” He finally got it; that God is a God of utter grace. Even though Jacob is a twister, a swindler, a crook, a thief, God still comes and says, “I am going to bless Jacob.”

A Gracious Choosing

You might ask the question, “How could God choose someone like Jacob?” God looks and knows what Jacob will be like. How could God choose Isaac or Rebekah? He knows their family is a mess. I think a more appropriate question would be, “How could God choose anybody?” Not, “How could He choose Jacob? How could He choose Isaac? How could He choose Rebekah?” They really are just a mirror, aren’t they? I mean if we’re here this morning and we are mildly self-aware and we know how we hurt people, we know how we fail as fathers and mothers and sons and daughters and we know how we follow our heart and pursue our heart’s desire and walk in the stubbornness of our heart instead of God’s Word and we know how we manipulate people instead of trusting God’s promises, and we know how as families or as individuals we can lose our bearings spiritually, if we’re here and we’re mildly self-aware then we know that the answer to the question, “How could God choose Jacob? How could God choose anybody?” we know that the answer, the only answer, is grace. Look at Jacob. Jacob is nothing but a failure as a moral example and yet Tim Keller says, “God brings His scandalous grace into the lives of people who don’t seek it, don’t deserve it, continually resist it, and don’t even appreciate it after they’ve been saved by it.” That is the story of Genesis 27, that’s the story of your Bible, and Christian, that is your story. God works through scandalous grace. Take comfort this morning, Christian, in Psalm 46. “The God of Jacob is our refuge.” Take comfort knowing that God knows you and He loves you, that God knows you and He loves you. The Lord has a unique affection for ordinary, weak, and hurting people. And so bring your hurt, bring your wounds, bring your worst and your weakness and your need and your brokenness, bring it to the Lord Jesus Christ. He will never leave you or forsake you. Declare bankruptcy of heart. Run to Him. Take Him. Cling to Him.

A Greater Betrayal and Banishment

You know there was someone else who was betrayed, someone else who

experienced deceit, someone else who was banished from His Father's house. You see, Jacob was wrong when he says, "I am the firstborn." That was a lie. Hebrews says about Jesus that "He is the firstborn of God." Paul, in Colossians, tells us that "Jesus Christ is the firstborn of all creation." Look at verse 13. One commentator said on this verse, "In the most awesome reversal of all, Jesus would graciously say to us what Rebekah rashly said to her son, 'Let the curse fall on me so that you can get the blessing.'" You see, she didn't even know what she was talking about but Jesus did. Jesus took your curse so that you might inherit His blessing. Listen to Paul in Galatians 3. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us. He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to us through Jesus Christ." That's telling you that Jesus Christ dressed up like you, took the curse for your sins, so that you could get the firstborn blessing and benediction from the Father, so that the Father can look at us and all of our sin, all of our mess, and can say, "You are My child in whom I am well pleased. I am not going to count what you have done against you; I'm going to count it against My Son and I'm going to give you the credit, I'm going to give you the blessing that He earned." And He loves you and He finds utter pleasure in you because of the righteous robes of Jesus.

I'll end with this. With my job here working at the church with young adults I officiate a lot of weddings. And it is a great joy. It is one of the best parts of my job. And one thing that I notice more and more, the closer you get to a wedding day, you have the bride's schedule and then you have the groom's schedule, and they could not be more different. I was married, Lauren and I were married four years ago. These are the kinds of things that Lauren was thinking about the week of our wedding. "Did I forget to invite anyone? Did we get so-and-so a ride from the airport? Did we talk to the photographer about that thing? Did they set up the flowers in that particular way that we talked about?" Here's what I was thinking about. We were married in Colorado. I flew to Colorado on Monday, I played golf Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. And all that I thought about was my bride; all that I thought about was Lauren. A little bit of putting but mainly it was about Lauren.

What is Jesus thinking about? The New Testament says that "for the joy set before him, he endured the cross." What was the joy set before Jesus? His bride. It was His bride. He has a delight, a love, he is consumed and preoccupied and concerned for the everlasting beauty and loveliness of His bride. That is the result of trusting in Jesus. Jesus Christ dressed up like us, got the curse we deserved, so that when we trust in Christ, when we rest on His work, we can be clothed like Him, in Jesus' righteousness. That is an invitation for all of us to come and to taste and see that the Lord is good. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we see and we know the darkness within our own hearts and we confess that we cannot fix ourselves. So we pray that You would take these truths and that You would cause them in our hearts to lead to worship of You. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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