

November 11, 2018

## Lesson 11: Jacob Receives Isaac's Blessing

Scripture: Gen. 27: 5-10, 18-19, 21-29

### Context:

Last week we met two twins, Jacob and Esau. The two were as different as could be with varying interests and even different physical attributes. They do their own thing and even battle with each other as our story reminds us in their exchange over the birthright in exchange for a bowl of stew. The perfect storm is created.

Our chapter opens up with Isaac on his deathbed. As Isaac gives Esau instructions for how he is to be blessed as the patriarch of the next generation, he asks that Esau once again go and hunt before he receives his blessing. In the course of their conversation, Rebekah listens to what will happen. She takes the opportunity to plan her own blessing. She asks for Jacob to do just as she asks so that he will receive the blessing instead of his brother. Jacob agrees to go along with the plan.

So Jacob puts on his brother's clothes, gives up two of his goats to be the food, and then covers himself with fur so that he can be as hairy as Esau. When he approaches Isaac, his father is not easily fooled. He can hear that this is not Esau, but his other son. Yet with failing eyesight it may be hard to see. So he touches Jacob and feels that the fur must indeed be the hair that covers his eldest. When asked for confirmation, Jacob lies and says that he is indeed Esau.

They then proceed to the blessing where Jacob brings him the food to eat and then wine is brought forward to wash down the food and dull Isaac's senses. Isaac invites him forward to receive a kiss and in doing so, Isaac can smell his oldest son. It is the distinct smell of sweat, the outdoors, and perhaps even of animal. This is Esau, the oldest son, the hunter and the one who will be the next patriarch.

So Isaac blesses Jacob. He asks specific blessings to fall upon him and that he be the one that has nations bow down to serve him. Perhaps the most condemning and ironic part of the blessing is that he will be the most powerful brother of all and that all relatives bow down to him. Those who curse him will be cursed and those who bless him will be blessed.

Jacob has stolen his brother's blessing. He has been given the words and affirmation that his brother would have received. In the process, a whole family falls apart with distrust and betrayal. Yet in the midst of it, Jacob is the one who is blessed. Regardless of our feelings about the characters and their roles in the narrative, the narrative shows that God is strangely at work for Jacob without regard to what we think about him or his mother.<sup>1</sup> Jacob is the one God makes father of Israel and is the one who continues the covenant made with Abraham.

### Application

This story comes perfectly as the holiday season approaches. While we certainly prepare for Advent and the coming of the Christ child, we also know that family drama

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggeman, "Genesis," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY 1982), 235.

sometimes comes to a head in this season. Issues that have been brewing for years come to a boiling point and moments such as we read in the text show that we are not the only people with dysfunctional families. The same goes for the ancient world as well.

The easy approach in this text would try to focus upon the family dynamics and who should rack up the highest with the blame game. However, I think that misses the point of the text. We know that what Jacob did was sneaky. He pretended to be his brother. He lied to his father and said that he was his brother directly to his dying father. He took something that belonged to his brother.

Yet God is strangely an advocate for Jacob. He receives the blessing and he is the one who does become the patriarch of his family, giving birth to the twelve tribes of Israel. Even though he does something that we consider deceitful and wrong, he becomes the chosen one of God.

I think we can all learn from Jacob because we all have done something wrong in our lives where we have sinned. Perhaps we lied about something in a relationship to avoid conflict or even use someone. Maybe we lied at work to get ahead or show the boss who is really in charge. We may have deceived a “friend” so we can get something out of them that solely benefits us.

As perfect as some of us may strive to be, we all slip into behaviors that are not the healthiest and end up hurting ourselves and others in the long run. Even the most pious people can do the most heinous things in certain circumstances. All you have to do is open the history book of any group of people and see that people sometimes did something to get ahead.

Some pre-Civil War southern preachers said slavery was ordained by God according to the books of Philemon and Galatians to keep their status and to appease their wealthier congregants. When it came to women’s ordination in various denominations, tempers flared. Some Christian male clergy and laity said that women cannot lead as senior pastors from the words in First Timothy and the letter to the Corinthians. While they may have cried it’s about biblical authority, the actual truth is that they desired control and saw the threat of women who may be as gifted or even more prepared for ministry than them. That struggle continues even today.

Those individuals were all Christians and did good things for the kingdom. Yet they had their growing edges. We can add to that list the number of things we do that do not highlight our best selves.

Yet the Lord continues to love us and give us grace that we do not deserve. Even though we may make a mess of the world around us, God still uses us in some way to do good work for the kingdom. That is something I try to remember for myself and for those around me. We are all sinners and we all struggle from time to time, day to day. Yet God is still at work in us and continues to use us with our growing edges. How do you experience God blessing you? What growing edges do you have like Jacob? Where have you felt God used you even though you did something wrong? Where do you see God at work in others with their growing edges? These are the kinds of questions that the story of Jacob gives us as we are reminded that even in all the messes we create, the Lord is still at work in our lives.

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