

Session Nine: God Blesses Jacob

Theme: Motivated to Love

Law/Gospel Focus:

Scripture tells us that we were sinful from birth. Because of this sin we were doomed to be eternally separated from God. But God in His love for us sent Jesus to die for us, while we were still sinners. His love for us motivates us to love and to serve others.

Objectives:

By the power of the Holy Spirit working through God's Word we will:

- 1) identify the reckless, sinful behaviors of Jacob and Esau;
- 2) affirm that God did not choose us because of our goodness, but solely by grace through faith in Jesus;
- 3) seek new ways to speak and to demonstrate God's love to others, including those who seem most unlovable.

Introduction:

- 1). List the traits, or characteristics, your parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents passed down to you.
- 2). Place a + (plus sign) next to those characteristics you consider positive and a – (minus sign) next to those you consider negative.
- 3). What causes you to classify some traits as positive and others as negative?

Scripture tells us that all generations of people since Adam and Eve have inherited sin. Without God's intervention we would all die eternally in our sin—remain forever separated from God. But God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sin on a cross. By Jesus' death on the cross God rescued us from death and gives us life. We inherit the good and perfect traits of Jesus.

Inform:

Read Genesis 25: 29-34 and Genesis 27:1-29.

About the Text:

The next major section in the history of the patriarchs is introduced as the “genealogical history” of Isaac, that is, the story of Isaac and his descendants. The beginning of the account focuses on the faithfulness of God in answering prayer (25:21). This is followed immediately by Rebekah’s inquiry and God’s revelation of the impending birth of twins and their significance (25:22-23). Taken together the two parts of this introduction emphasize that what is about to happen is God’s work, intended to advance His plan for our salvation.

The guiding hand of God is also apparent in the announcement that the older of the two brothers would serve the younger. This is contrary to the common law of the ancient world that gives priority to the oldest son. God is not bound by human law, however, and His choice of the younger son demonstrates that the Kingdom of God is not established by, or ruled according to human tradition.

As Rebekah is giving birth to the two boys, Jacob grasps at Esau’s heel, a picture of the brother’s future relationship. A reader in the ancient world would easily grasp the significance of this detail. The heel symbolizes the place of weakness (see also Genesis 3:15; Job 18:9; Hosea 12:3 in the Bible and the story of Achilles in Greek mythology). In effect, Jacob will overcome Esau at Esau’s point of vulnerability. Years later, when Esau shows his weakness—his hunger—Jacob takes advantage of him. He purchases Esau’s birthright, and with it the rights to Esau’s inheritance, in exchange for a pot of stew. Jacob is presented as a shrewd dealer, but not a wicked man. It is Esau who is condemned, for he cares more for his own comfort than for the promises of God that were his by right as the oldest son and Isaac’s heir. This disregard for God and His blessings earned him a reputation as “godless” (Hebrews 12:16).

The account of Isaac and Abimelech mirrors the story of Abraham, and the king named Abimelech. (The latter king is probably the grandfather; royal names were often passed from generation to generation in the ancient world.) Both episodes take place after resolving a critical question: Which son would inherit the birthright and become the bearer of the promises of God?

As chapter 27 opens, Isaac is near the end of his life. He recognizes that it is time to pass the blessing to his son. He is apparently unaware that Esau has sold his birthright. For his part, Esau gladly conceals the truth; he is willing to cheat his brother out of the birthright that was lawfully, if shrewdly, obtained. Jacob deceives his father and lies, but in doing so he obtains only what was lawfully his. This does not excuse his behavior, but we do need to understand that Esau was lying when he later claims that Jacob deceived him twice and taken his birthright and blessing (27:36).

Jacob dresses up like Esau and receives his father’s blessing. In doing so he inadvertently fulfills the promise that God gave to Rebekah, “the older will serve the younger” (25:23). Jacob still has many lessons to learn before he is ready to be a leader of God’s people, but the course is set. God, who is always faithful to His word, has blessed Jacob, and through him all humankind in his descendant, Jesus the Savior.

Discussing the Text:

- 1). What evidence of sin do you see in the relationships between Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob and Esau?
- 2). How does God take that which is considered humanly right and common and turn it topsy-turvy?
- 3). How does God use the sins of Jacob and Esau to accomplish His will? What does this tell us about God's nature?

Connect:

A first reaction to this story may include contempt for both Esau and Jacob. Each son certainly acted recklessly, with little regard for God's law or kindness. Yet the story may be familiar in our own lives. Who has not, at one time or another traded the blessings of God for some fleeting pleasure? The truth is that the spirit of Esau lives in us, too. Like him, we sell our birthright whenever we turn from God to serve ourselves. And Jacob? He lied to get what was rightfully his. Who has not told some "little white lie" when the situation seemed to justify it? We typically excuse ourselves by saying that it was for someone else's good, or that it was easier to tell a simple lie than to explain a complex truth. The real truth is that we are almost always serving ourselves. Jacob was doing exactly what we do all the time.

God used Jacob's sin to accomplish His will. That does not mean that God condones sin, or that it is acceptable to sin if something good comes of it. It does mean that God is greater than our sin: He can make all things work together for good (Romans 8:28), even the things that we do wrong. This does not give us a license to sin, but it should comfort us with the knowledge that the grace of God is great indeed, greater even than our sin. The fact that God chose Jacob despite his sin also reminds us that God does not choose us because we are good. We are sinners just as Jacob and Esau were sinners, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Our salvation is rooted in the gracious choice of God.

- 1). How have you at times traded the blessings of God?
- 2) How has demonstrated in your life that He is greater than your sin?

3). How does the knowledge that God can make all things work together for good give you hope and confidence as you face the future?

4). Read Romans 5:8. How does that fact that God chooses sinners to accomplish His purpose and will encourage you?

5). Although God does not condone sin, what does God willingly offer to all repentant sinners?

6). Describe the magnitude of God's love as revealed in St. Paul's statement, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."