

“THE PATHWAY TO A BLESSED LIFE” **(Genesis 27:41-28:9)**

As we continue our study of Genesis this morning, we come to chapter 27, and today we’re going to talk about the pathway to a blessed life. The word “blessed” or “blessing” is a word we hear often, both inside the church and outside the church. For example...

- When someone sneezes you say “God bless you.” Even atheists say God bless you.
- A grandparent will squeeze the cheek of their two-year old grandchild and say, “Bless your little heart.”
- Before sporting events someone sings “God Bless America.”
- When the president finishes a speech he will say, “God bless you and God bless the United States of America.”
- When you sit down to eat you pray God’s “blessing on the meal.”
- When a daughter wants to marry a young man, she will seek to “gain her parent’s blessing.”
- When someone sends you a card or makes you a meal you say, “What a blessing you are.”

To be blessed is something we all desire...

- We want to be blessed materially with food, a home, and financial security.
- We want to be blessed physically with good health and a long life.
- We want to be blessed emotionally with peace and joy and contentment.
- We want to be blessed relationally with friends and people who love us.
- We want to be blessed spiritually with God’s love and presence.

As you might suspect, the word “bless” comes from the Bible and is used in one form or another over 500 times. It appears in the first chapter of the Bible where it says God blessed mankind and blessing continues to be a major theme throughout the book of Genesis, used some 87 times.

It’s an important word, but what exactly does it mean to be blessed? After doing a bit of a deep dive into how the word blessing is used in the Bible, I came up a definition that will guide all that we’ll talk about this morning: Blessing is God’s favor on those who are rightly related to Him and who live in harmony with His will. Everyone, simply by being alive, is a recipient of God’s blessing through His common grace. God causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. But those who belong to God through faith in Christ are recipients of special grace and blessing – not necessarily material blessing, but spiritual blessing.

Ephesians 1:3 says, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” Spiritual blessings refer to our spiritual status and position as believers – before Christ we were dead in our sins and trespasses, but through Christ we have been made alive to God – where we once we alienated from God, we have been adopted into His family, with all the rights and privileges that come from being His children. God gives us everything we need to thrive and prosper in the Christian life – we have peace, joy, hope, contentment, fulfillment, and security – all given to us by the grace of God.

As great as all these blessings are, in order to enjoy the full benefits of our blessings we must live in harmony with God's will and do what He tells us to do. Before the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey – a land of great abundance – Moses said, “If you fully obey the Lord and carefully follow all His commands, all these blessings will come to you” (Deuteronomy 28:1). Moses then went on to list several blessings they would enjoy, such as God blessing their flocks and filling their barns with grain and protecting them from their enemies.

Then Moses says, “However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you” (Deuteronomy 28:15). He goes on to list a number of afflictions that would fall on them for disobeying God. As God's chosen people and there was nothing they could do to sever their covenant relationship with Him, but in order to enjoy His abundant blessings, they needed to live in harmony with His will and obey Him.

A perfect example of this principle is found in the lives of Esau and Jacob. Esau illustrates the life of a person who is not rightly related to God and as a result does not have or enjoy God's blessing. Jacob, on the other hand, illustrates a person who is rightly related to God and has God's blessing on his life, but because of sin and disobedience does not enjoy the benefits of His blessing.

Esau and Jacob both grew up listening to their grandfather Abraham tell the story of how God chose their family to be the conduit of His blessing to the world. They heard about the covenant God made with Abraham, promising to bless him with land, many descendants, and stature among the other nations. What they didn't know at the time was that Jesus would come through the line of Abraham and be the ultimate fulfillment of that covenant by blessing the world through His death on the cross for our sins.

Abraham passed the covenant promises on to Isaac, and Isaac intended to pass the blessing on to his firstborn son Esau, but last week we saw how Jacob deceived Isaac into giving it to him. Both brothers sinned – Esau despised his spiritual blessing by trading it for a bowl of stew – and Jacob resorted to lying and deception in order to obtain it. As we pick up the story in verse 41 of chapter 28, both brothers are going to reap the consequences of their sin.

Verse 41... “Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, ‘The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.’” Esau held a grudge. Have you ever held a grudge? I know people, as I'm sure you do, who held on to a grudge for several decades. The dictionary defines a grudge as: A persistent feeling of ill will or resentment resulting from a past insult or injury.

On one hand, Esau had a right feel ill will towards Jacob. Esau was all set to receive his father's blessing, but Jacob swooped in and stole it. When Esau found out what Jacob had done, verse 34 says he let out a loud and bitter cry. The Hebrew word indicates it was the kind of cry and wailing used of mourners at a funeral. Esau had lost something he desperately wanted, and now it was gone forever.

In reality, Esau had only himself to blame. He was the one who impulsively sold his birthright for a bowl of stew. He wanted the material blessings of his father, but he didn't care, or have any interest in, the spiritual blessings God gave to Abraham and Isaac. He sold his birthright to Jacob and even raised his right hand and swore an oath to make it official. But it's human nature to blame someone else, and Esau puts Jacob in direct line of his crosshairs.

In verse 42 it says that Esau “comforted” himself by holding a grudge. I find that word fascinating. How does holding a grudge bring comfort? Holding a grudge is really a defense mechanism to protect ourselves from shame and humiliation. Somebody did something to me or said something about me, and I’ve got to do something to erase the humiliation and regain my pride and dignity. I’ve got to teach my offender a lesson, I’ve got to punish them, I’ve got to make them feel my pain, and demonstrate to them that I’m in control.

When someone wrongs us, our natural instinct is to seek comfort in revenge – even if we don’t act out our revenge, we at least find some comfort in harboring ill will and resentment against them – it validates our pain and gives us a sense of control. The problem is that holding grudges doesn’t give us the comfort we seek and it doesn’t heal our pain. We think we’re hurting our offender, but we’re really hurting ourselves. We think we’re in control, but we’re actually letting our offender control us.

God’s way of dealing with hurt is to release it to Him. You all know the verse, “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Romans 12:19). God’s way of dealing with hurt gives you comfort in knowing that God will repay all wrongs, and it releases you from having to do the job. It releases you to love and forgive and do good to your enemies. But Esau is going to let his grudge simmer for two decades.

In verse 42 the consequences of sin shifts to Jacob... “When Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, ‘Your brother Esau is planning to avenge himself by killing you. Now then, my son, do what I say: Flee at once to my brother Laban in Harran. Stay with him for a while until your brother’s fury subsides. When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I’ll send word for you to come back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?’”

Rebekah always seems to be in the know about things, and when she hears about Esau’s vengeful vendetta, she tells Jacob to flee... go stay and stay with my brother Laban in Harran – some 500 miles away – stay there until Esau’s anger subsides. Jacob, remember, has the family blessing, but because he lied and deceived to get it, he will be forced to be a fugitive. Rebekah and Jacob both assume that he’ll be on the run for a short while – maybe a few weeks or months – but Jacob will actually not return for another twenty years – and by the time he gets home, both Isaac and Rebekah will be dead.

When Rebekah concocted her plan for Jacob to get the blessing, she never imagined that she would never see her son again. “Be not deceived, God is not mocked – whatever a man sows that shall he also reap.” Rebekah and Jacob would pay an enormous price for trying to play God and sinning to get what God had already promised.

Verse 46 illustrates how sin not only hurts us, it hurts others... “Then Rebekah said to Isaac, ‘I’m disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living.’” Nobody is happy in this family – even though they are God’s chosen family, no one is enjoying the benefits of God’s blessings. Esau’s decision to marry two Hittite women bring grief to Isaac and Rebekah.

The Hittites were one of several clans that made up the Canaanite people. The Canaanites were descendants of Ham, one of Noah’s three sons. Ham is the one who mocked his father, and a curse was placed on him and his descendants. Ham’s shameful behavior would continue through his son Canaan, who settled the land God later promised to Abraham. The land is often referred to as the land of Canaan.

The Canaanites were among the most evil, depraved people who've ever lived – and they are the ones who settled in and built the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah – which gives you an idea of what they were like. God gave them every opportunity to repent, but their cycle of depravity continued from generation to generation – so that when the children of Israel returned to the Promised Land 400 years later, God commanded Joshua to conquer and destroy the Canaanites. He did not want their wicked lifestyle to corrupt God's people.

Esau is not a descendent of cursed line of Canaan, but the blessed line of Noah's son Shem. Esau is a Shemite – or as we would say today a Semite – this is where the term “Semitic” comes from. He has no business marrying a Hittite, let alone two Hittite women, who are not part of the godly line. Abraham went to great lengths to make sure that Isaac didn't marry a Canaanite. But Esau doesn't care – he's going to do what he's going to do. The spiritual blessing of his family means nothing, and his choices bring grief to his parents.

It's a reminder that sin not only affects us, but everyone around us. Remember Achan in the book of Joshua? As Israel was going to battle, God told them not to take any of the spoils of victory, but Achan was greedy and took some of the loot and hid it in his tent. As a result of his disobedience, 36 men were killed in battle. When one person sins, it affects the whole community. Esau's attitude was, “What I do is my own business... I'll do what I want to do.” Sin has a ripple effect that spreads to others. When David sinned with Bathsheba, it tore his family and kingdom apart, and the ripple effects were felt for centuries to come.

God has designed us to live in community, so that what we do – good or bad – impacts the whole community. Before we do something, we need to think about how our actions will affect our church, our spouse, our kids, and even the generations that follow us. Philippians 2:3-4 says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” Esau did not do this and brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah.

Rebekah wants to get Jacob away from Esau, and knows how to get Isaac's support. She says, “I can't bear the thought of Jacob marrying a Hittite like Esau did. What if you sent him away to my family to find a wife – just like when your father sent a servant to come find me. That worked out pretty well. What if you did the same thing with Jacob?”

Verse one of chapter 28 says, “So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him. Then he commanded him: 'Do not marry a Canaanite woman. Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother.'”

Don't miss the fact that Isaac is now fully on board with Jacob being the son to inherit the covenant promises. He stubbornly tried to give the blessing to Esau, but God overruled him. He now sees that Esau is not fit to be the spiritual patriarch of the family, and he blesses Jacob. He says in the form of a command, “Don't marry a Canaanite like your brother, but go back to your mother's family in Paddan Aram, and find a wife from among the daughters of your Laban, your mother's brother.”

In order for God's covenant promises to be fulfilled Jacob needs a wife, and if God is going to bless the world through the line of Jacob, he cannot marry someone from a cursed line. Several years earlier Isaac needed a wife, and Abraham said, "I don't want you to marry a local Canaanite girl. God has set us apart as a holy people and distinct from the other nations who do not share our morals and values. I'm going to find a wife for you from my own people."

The most important component in a marriage, above everything else, is spiritual compatibility. That's why the New Testament says, "*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.*" Abraham wanted Isaac to marry someone from his side of the family – from the family of Shem that God – so he sent his servant back to his own people – some 500 miles away – to find a wife for Isaac – and that wife turned out to be Rebekah. Now he sends Jacob himself to find a wife, as well as flee the wrath of Esau.

In verses 3-5 Isaac pronounces another blessing on Jacob... "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham." Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way, and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, who was the mother of Jacob and Esau."

In his blessing Isaac reviews many of the original promises given to Abraham – the promise of many descendants and possession of the Promised Land. The exciting part – in the big picture of the Bible – is that these blessings include you and me today. All of the promises God made to Abraham look forward to Jesus – the greatest descendant of Abraham – who came to bring us salvation.

The books of Romans and Galatians tell us that when we come to faith in Christ, we become the children of Abraham and we share in the spiritual blessings God promised him. And like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God wants us to be conduits of His blessing to the world. We do that by spreading the good news that sinners can be saved and forgiven by trusting in Christ as their Savior. When we're saved, we become a part of a family of believers called the church – and as His church, God wants us to be fruitful and multiply, so that more and more people are added to His family. And one day, when Christ returns and establishes His kingdom on earth, we will join Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in living in the land God promised them.

After being blessed, Jacob left for Paddan-Aram. He's under God's blessing, but has a long way to go before he experiences the benefits of his blessing. But he'll get there, and his story encourages us that while although we reap the natural consequences of sin and disobedience, God will slowly mold us and make us into the person he wants us to be.

In verses 6-9 the focus shifts back to Esau... "Now Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to Paddan Aram to take a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he commanded him, 'Do not marry a Canaanite woman,' and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Paddan Aram. Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; so he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, in addition to the wives he already had."

When I first read this, I thought, “What a spiteful, vicious thing for Esau to do – to marry another pagan woman to get back at his father.” But that’s not what Esau’s doing at all. He desperately wants his father’s approval, and when he hears how Isaac didn’t want Jacob to marry a Canaanite, he goes to Ishmael and marries one of his daughters. Ishmael was the son Abraham had with Hagar, and Esau thinks that marrying Ishmael’s daughter will please his father... “Look dad, I’m marrying someone in the family. I’m doing what you want.”

The problem is that Ishmael was not part of God’s covenant family. After Isaac was born, Genesis 21 says that Ishmael mocked Isaac. It was indicative of the kind of person Ishmael was – he rejected God’s plan and his descendants would be in conflict with Jacob’s descendants for centuries to come. Because he would not accept Isaac as the promised son, Abraham sent Ishmael away symbolizing that he was not part of God’s covenant family.

Esau lacks the spiritual insight to see this, and his efforts to make up for his indifference to God are too little and too late. He’s a tragic example of someone who is not blessed because he was not rightly related to God, and because he was not right with God, he lived a bitter, self-absorbed life.

Everyone wants to be blessed, but the pathway to a blessed life is by being rightly related to God and living in harmony with His will. Being in a right relationship with God means that you acknowledge that you’ve sinned and fallen short of God’s righteous standards, and there’s nothing you can do to be made right with God. You need a Savior, and through Abraham’s descendent Jesus, you can be saved from the judgment of your sins. The good news of the gospel is on the cross Jesus took the judgment that you deserved, and when you trust Him as your Savior you are made right with God.

The moment you make the decision to believe in Christ, you become part of God’s family and have every blessing in Christ. You enter into a whole new life with everything you need to thrive and prosper. But as Jacob shows us, you can be under God’s hand of blessing, but because of sin and disobedience not enjoy the full benefits of God’s blessing. If you want to experience His blessing, live in harmony with God’s will and obey Him. Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.