

Jacob and Joseph

A Stolen Blessing

Scripture:

Read Genesis 27:18-33 as a group.

Introduction:

Old Testament scholar Ian Duguid writes, *“God’s purposes for man’s ultimate good will stand; they cannot be frustrated by human failures. This is a tremendously important biblical principle: your sin, even while it may have real and lasting earthly consequences, cannot derail God’s gracious purpose for your life.”* This is a fitting summation of the stories of Jacob, Joseph, and their families. As you’ll soon discover, the narratives surrounding these early patriarchs are more “messy” than they are “holy.” *That may be an understatement.* As we peek into the scriptures and “under the hood” of these family’s stories, you may be surprised by what you uncover: generational insecurities, familial jealousy, favoritism, deceit, deception, lust, power plays, skepticism, doubt, fear, and more. You might think this sounds more like a noon day soap opera than a biblical narrative describing the beginnings of the Christian faith! But the fact that this untidy family is the means that God uses to establish his name and reveal his character ought to make us ponder the profound implications. It would seem that Duguid is correct, that *“Your sin, while it may have real and lasting earthly consequences, cannot derail God’s gracious purpose for your life.”*

Genesis 27 is a story dominated by the theme of blessing. Isaac is nearing the end of his life and in order to perpetuate the blessing given to him and to his father Abraham, Isaac instructs his eldest (and favorite) son Esau on when, where, and how he would receive the blessing from his father. Rebekah, however, has a favorite younger son of her own named Jacob. Rebekah devised a plan in order to dupe her aging husband into giving the blessing to the younger son instead of the elder. *It would seem we’re off to a stellar start.* Favoritism. Secret blessings. Trickery. Lying. And you might have guessed that the fall-out from this plan wreaks havoc on the entire family. Esau wants Jacob dead. Jacob has to leave the family in order to save his life. We can assume the resulting tension between Rebekah and Isaac. It appears to be an absolute disaster. We would be wise to stop and ask the simple question: *“God, where are you in all of this?”*

Duguid comments, *“There are no heroes in Genesis 27...Every man and woman in this whole mess has been false to the core. Each of them has been self-seeking, self-trusting, self-serving, using others and trying to use God for their ends. But God’s purposes still stand...Grace was at work in the lives of the patriarchs, and the grace of God would not let them go.”* They would receive the blessing promised to them. Yet their reception of it had nothing to do with them and everything to do with the faithfulness of the God who made the promise. This is the perpetual undercurrent of Jacob and Joseph’s story – and it will sustain them, *and us*, time and time again.

Reflection: Take personal inventory of your life, heart, and spiritual journey. Use these prompts as a way to prepare for group discussions or for personal times of prayer.

1. For a moment, reflect on your own family and the ups and downs you’ve experienced together. Are there experiences or relationships you doubt that God can redeem or renew? How come?
2. What does the concept of “blessing” mean to you? What are its characteristics?

Discuss:

1. What about the sermon stood out or impacted you the most? Do you have any follow-up questions about the sermon?
2. Who’s to blame in Genesis 27? Upon whom would you lay the bulk of the fault? Rebekah? Isaac? Jacob? Esau? Take a moment to discuss each. Then read Genesis 25:19-28 as a group. These verses provide helpful context for understanding what happened in Genesis 27. Pay careful attention to the oracle from God in Genesis 25:23. (Hint: The second Duguid quote from the introduction may help you make sense of the question of blame!)
3. Re-read verses 30-38 (chapter 27), focusing on Esau’s reaction to the stolen blessing. It would appear from Isaac’s reaction in verse 33 that he knew he’d been caught trying to usurp God’s plan (see Genesis 25:23). Yet Esau is still desirous of his father’s love and blessing. He wants what his father cannot fully give. *That principle is hugely significant.* Human blessings are good but not good enough; they’re wonderful but still deficient in filling our souls. Discuss the concept of blessing and the modern search to get it.
4. **Missional Living:** This story is all about family and the mess we make together. When it comes to thinking missionally, we’re quick to think “out there” and often neglect to consider our family. Who in your family comes to mind when you think about loving missionally? Your parents? Kids? In-laws? Siblings? Someone else? What might be a next step for you?

Apply:

In order to *be* a blessing to someone else, we have to not *need* it from someone else. Said another way, we can only give away what we don’t have to have. I can only bless you if I don’t need you to bless me. As humans, we’re prone to take blessings rather than give them. That cycle only ends once the blessing of God in Christ becomes sufficient. Once Christ is enough for you, only then will you be able to truly bless others. This week, each day, invite the Lord to be your supreme source of blessing. Allow him to provide what you’re hoping to receive from others. Take notes on what the Lord brings to mind as you seek Him in this process.