



## The Blessing

by T.J. Campo

10.21.12

From the series The Patriarchs | The Gospel According to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

Genesis 27.1-33

*Now it came about, when Isaac was old, and his eyes were too dim to see, that he called his older son Esau and said to him, "My son." And he said to him, "Here I am." 2 And Isaac said, "Behold now, I am old and I do not know the day of my death. 3 "Now then, please take your gear, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me; 4 and prepare a savory dish for me such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die." 5 And Rebekah was listening while Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game to bring home, 6 Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Behold, I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, saying, 7 'Bring me some game and prepare a savory dish for me, that I may eat, and bless you in the presence of the LORD before my death.' 8 "Now therefore, my son, listen to me as I command you. 9 "Go now to the flock and bring me two choice kids from there, that I may prepare them as a savory dish for your father, such as he loves. 10 "Then you shall bring it to your father, that he may eat, so that he may bless you before his death." 11 And Jacob answered his mother Rebekah, "Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man and I am a smooth man. 12 "Perhaps my father will feel me, then I shall be as a deceiver in his sight; and I shall bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing." 13 But his mother said to him, "Your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me." 14 So he went and got them, and brought them to his mother; and his mother made savory food such as his father loved. 15 Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. 16 And she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. 17 She also gave the savory food and the bread, which she had made, to her son Jacob. 18 Then he came to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" 19 And Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your first-born; I have done as you told me. Get up, please, sit and eat of my game, that you may bless me." 20 And Isaac said to his son, "How is*

*it that you have it so quickly, my son?" And he said, "Because the LORD your God caused it to happen to me." 21 Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come close, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not." 22 So Jacob came close to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." 23 And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. 24 And he said, "Are you really my son Esau?" And he said, "I am." 25 So he said, "Bring it to me, and I will eat of my son's game, that I may bless you." And he brought it to him, and he ate; he also brought him wine and he drank. 26 Then his father Isaac said to him, "Please come close and kiss me, my son." 27 So he came close and kissed him; and when he smelled the smell of his garments, he blessed him and said, "See, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed; 28 Now may God give you of the dew of heaven, And of the fatness of the earth, And an abundance of grain and new wine; 29 May peoples serve you, And nations bow down to you; Be master of your brothers, And may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be those who curse you, And blessed be those who bless you." 30 Now it came about, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had hardly gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. 31 Then he also made savory 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." 32 And Isaac his father said to him, "Who are you?" And he said, "I am your son, your first-born, Esau." 33 Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was he then that hunted game and brought it to me, so that I ate of all of it before you came, and blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed."*

We're looking at the lives of the Fathers, the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...in The Book of Genesis.

These men and their families (three successive generations) were called out from the mass of humanity ...when the human race was basically ignorant of God, somehow aware we were created to know God...but unable to get **back to God ...and when our estrangement from God began to demonstrate itself in violence and in superstition and in violent superstition, then, God came to us!**

God came to this unqualified man, an idol-worshiper living **among** idol-worshippers, a man named Abraham and God introduced that man to **grace**. God promised to bless Abraham and Sarah and to make them a blessing to ALL THE OTHER NATIONS! The people of Abraham, people of the promise, the Israelites, would be a mediator for the nations, a pipeline, **a portal from God to us**. We

couldn't get to God so He would come to us, through Israel and eventually through the one Mediator who would be a descendant of the Patriarchs, Jesus Christ.

And one of the things we've seen from the origins of these **people of the promise** is that they **themselves are not very promising!** In fact, with all due respect, they seem more like a comedy-troupe than the Founding Fathers of God's people.

The picture we get **here** brings us to a new low. Today it'd be called a dysfunctional family. You look at each of these four characters and none of them is a moral example...I can't tell you to be like any of them! And yet this story declares **that IF** the world is going to be rescued and restored and if people are going to know God...**it's going to have to depend totally on God...that's the meaning of grace.**

Let's look at #1 – A Sophisticated Tale of God's Deceptive Family; #2 – Lessons: some unwarranted, some unimportant and one crucial; #3 – A Final Appeal to Modern Hearers.

When these twins were in the womb...they were already fighting. The mother Rebekah was beside herself and God answered her with an oracle, a prophecy that said, "These sons will be a picture of grace – the upside down Kingdom – where the race does not go to the swift. The older will serve the younger... Esau **the obvious choice, hairy, ruddy, manly, leader-type, the FIRSTBORN...** will serve the weaker Jacob, the homebody, the refined. I will show My strength in Jacob's weakness not in Esau's might."

So, Jacob, the weak, became the favorite of his mother (Rebekah) and Esau, the hunter, became the favorite of Isaac (the dad who loved to eat the game that Esau hunted). Extreme parental favoritism.

Then, maybe because he'd been raised by a mom who told him that he was destined for greatness (the oracle!) Jacob looked for an opportunity to prevail over his brother. Jacob found Esau hungry and famished after a hunt and offered him a bowl of stew in exchange for the birthright. Jacob wanted to be considered the firstborn...and Esau said, "Sure... whatever" and it was done.

Now, years later, it's time for Isaac (he's old and blind and bedridden...will live for many years but he doesn't know that) it's time for Isaac to sort of appoint his successor...head of the family. Does Isaac know about the oracle? I THINK so...but he has his OWN favorite and that sets up this story!

It's a very well crafted story. **Seven interlocking units** each consisting of dialogue... Isaac -> Esau ; Rebekah -> Jacob; Isaac-> Jacob; Isaac -> Esau and so on...

Isaac, the father, sends his favorite ("MY son", v.1) to hunt and cook a feast that will end in this blessing ceremony. And off goes Esau to the hunt.

Rebekah overhears the plan and she wants HER favorite ("MY son", v.8) to have that blessing (oracle!!) and so she springs into action... "Put Jacob in the place of the firstborn...get the blessing by deception!" She sends Jacob to get a goat and slaughter it (ironically, in later years his own sons are going to deceive Jacob with a slaughtered goat...and its blood smeared all over that coat of many colors!). But Jacob is afraid of getting caught...then he could get cursed instead... could backfire!

"After all Esau and I are not alike...dad's blind but he'll still notice. Esau is hairy and I'm smooth! This isn't going to work and then I'm gonna get caught!"

The mother says, "Leave that to me! If we fail, then may the curse fall on me!...Now go and get ready."

She makes some sort of gloves out of goat skin and wraps them around Jacob's arms and neck – and it's all such a rig...so cheesy!

And ...so he listens to his mother...she makes the goat into a delicious meal ("With the right spices, he'll never be able to tell whether it's venison or goat!") and he puts the gloves on and the clothing of his outdoorsman brother...so Jacob will smell like the field-and-stream guy!

Then, in the tent goes Jacob... "My father!" ("I mean ..uh..hmmm, MY FATHER!").

Here I am...who are you, my son?" (Big question!)

"I am Esau your first born." (Well, he was the firstborn because he purchased the rights to that title!) but he was not Esau.

Jacob tries to move it all along fast! "Get up, please, eat my game and bless me...quick!"

But Isaac's in no hurray...and he senses that there may be a problem here. (By the way: senses are very important to this story. See how many references there are to sight [eyes too dim to see])

taste, hearing [‘Rebekah was listening’, overhearing]) and touch and smell...all the senses are being used and all the senses are going to fail Isaac the father!)

So Isaac slows it down...the tension increases...and Isaac employs five tests to verify that this really is “MY son”, Esau. But none of the tests really do the trick...He almost uncovers the ruse in v. 22 when he HEARS that this is not the voice of Esau...but he trusts the feel of those hairy arms rather than the sound of that voice.

And none of the five tests is conclusive. Finally, Isaac smells the outdoorsy smell on the clothes and says, “Good enough!” And he blesses this deceiver as if to say, “You are truly the firstborn and the head of the family...my successor...the next Patriarch!”

Then ...out goes Jacob (quickly!) and immediately, in comes Esau...with that game-stew and again that important question, (v. 32) “Who are you?”

Esau says, “Who do you think I am?!...It’s me YOUR son, your first born, Esau!”

And Isaac starts trembling...he pronounced the words...which for them was THE way a blessing was conveyed. And Isaac can’t even say the name of the intruder, the thief...but he realizes that he could not by all his tests and his seeing, hearing, tasting, touch and smell ... HE COULD NOT THWART THE WILL OF GOD... the prophecy stands. And the final words of this reading are a kind of concession speech, a word of recognition and even of faith (Heb. 11.20). “I blessed him...Yes, and he shall be blessed!”

Then Esau (and this goes beyond where we stopped) Esau flips out and starts wailing. He can’t get it back – it’s been pronounced. “Is there anything you can say, Dad?...Is there a second blessing?”

So Isaac tries...but it sounds more like a curse...Best part of it is the words, “And by your sword you shall live, and your brother you shall serve; but it shall come about when you become restless, that you shall break his yoke from your neck.” Wow! Pretty dismal.

Then Esau vows revenge. “After my father dies, I will kill my brother Jacob!”

So mom tells Jacob to run away for a while. “Go to where I used to live...take up with my brother, your Uncle Laban...I’ll send for you when it cools down!”

BTW...it never did cool down. When Rebekah said she'd bear the curse if it didn't work...well, she did bear it. After Jacob left home his mother would never see her favorite son again.

Then Isaac sees that Jacob really is the successor and that he couldn't thwart God's will any more than he could stop the tides...or the seasons...so (next chapter) Isaac blesses Jacob with the whole Abrahamic covenant and he becomes full successor. The seed of the woman that would crush evil and save the world will come from Jacob's line.

Then Jacob was sent away.

Now when you try to apply this passage you run into to some trouble. No one is exemplary. All of these people are reprehensible and not the kind of people you would want as friends!

And because we want to find SOME life lessons when we read the Bible, you could try to really stretch and you **may** come up with some unwarranted lessons. For instance: the end justifies the means.

You know! You can't make an omelet without crackin' a few eggs! So, if you have to lie or cheat to get some things done...well...hey...that's what the Patriarchs did!

I think you can see though that this is NOT the lesson we're supposed to learn here.

Maybe a little closer to the truth, looking at the rest of the Bible, you can find some valid illustrations here. For instance, parental favoritism is wrong and almost always leads to bad stuff.

Spouses ought to communicate and cooperate in their parenting and in their marriages. Of the seven dialogues here, Isaac and Rebekah don't speak at all until the last verse of ch. 27 and it's only one verse (a big complaint from a wife to a husband)...So, wives and husbands ought to communicate. That's a lesson, and important but not really what the writer wants us to see...sort of unimportant to his real purpose.

Or deception is wrong...and that does come across here. Lying has consequences. Rebekah lost her son because of her deception and his participation. Jacob went away and she never saw him again.

OR: be careful how you name your kids. I guess you could learn that here...Isaac means laughter...he's sort of laughable...his senses fail him...he's trying to get the laugh on God and oppose

the prophecy but the laugh's on him...Jacob means a deceiver (v. 36) ...They lived up to their names.

Or, "like father – like son", i.e. your sins will tend to show up in your children. Isaac was a slave to meat, to food. AND so his son Esau had an inordinate love of food – sold his place, his birthright for it. And Jacob would use a slaughtered goat and some clothing to carry off a deception...and later, when his sons kidnapped HIS favorite son (Joseph) they would use the blood of a goat and Joseph's clothing ("the coat of many colors") to deceive the deceiver. So, your sins will find you out...will show up in the next generations...not an unimportant lesson but not really the main thrust...not why Moses included this very unflattering story about God's first family.

So what IS this one big idea? Well, even when God's chosen people do all we can possibly do to mess things up, God will bring His plan to completion.

God will use them...but quite often it's despite them. It's not that they are basically good people or qualified or heroic. They are, like us, a bunch of bumlbers and exaggerators and often deceptive and sometimes just hard-boiled manipulators...Yeah, but you're not saying that God condones that are you T.J.?

Nope.

Nothing in the passage says that God approves of their deception and conniving and their laughable antics...but everything is screaming to us that despite all these things God will bring grace into the world.

The great folly of all follies... God came in the Person of Jesus Christ and He was victimized by deceit when His disciple Judas, masqueraded as a friend and yet was a betrayer. And the earliest post-resurrection sermon by St Peter would explain it this way:

*"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know--this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. (Acts 2.22-24)*

Moses is teaching the children of Israel in the wilderness, "Look! These are our roots! The plan of God doesn't depend on our goodness but on His faithfulness!"

The Apostles of Jesus Christ saw it throughout all of sacred history and they saw it reach it's zenith in the ultimate deception – our sin, the rejection of God in Jesus Christ, our sin would not thwart the plan of God but in God's mystery and goodness would actually be used to bring God's *"predetermined plan" into being.*

Does this excuse our sin? Does it free us to sin or encourage us to sin? NO WAY! Sin still has really bad consequences. It destroys relationships and depletes our sanity and ruins families...but it's not stronger than God.

We say, "The devil's in the details" but really God is in the details. He's using it all to bring grace into the world.

So the final charge or appeal is this: "Acquiesce!" Isaac did. He saw that his senses would only take him so far and were not really, finally reliable...The most reliable sense in this story is the sense of hearing (look at it and you'll see) because hearing is closest to faith.

Faith comes by hearing – hearing the Word of God. In the end Isaac saw, "I should have listened to God's word...should have believed it."

And looking at the world...looking at our individual lives the wisest approach is to say, "Lord, it's not dependent on my efforts or my will-power but on Your promise...Your grace in Jesus Christ.

Lord, help me, teach me to live as a man or a woman who listens...who receives...and trusts, repents, believes Your words of grace and truth.

In my senses...I can so easily focus on human folly and sin...can see it and smell it and taste it...it concerns me...**but** the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus speaks to my faith...Lord, teach me to rest and repent, to receive and to walk in the newness of life."