

SESSION #11

We now move on to the next generation of the patriarchs, Jacob, and begin by examining the...

BIRTHRIGHT & BLESSING

A few years ago, the combination of Boeing's latest aviation technology and Singapore Airlines' decades-long safety record were not enough to overcome the deadly combination of tragic human errors on the runway at Taipei. As a result, flight 006 never got airborne and scores of people lost their lives.

- by Genesis 25 a combination of **human failings** threatens to bring down the Promise which God had entrusted to Abraham and his family
- we've been concentrating on Abraham, "the friend of God," "the man of faith" and the "father of the faithful". He was not perfect, but his faith became legendary and the covenant promise God made with him became the foundation for all the rest of God's covenant work of promise.

But now we come to one of the Bible's most faulty characters, **Jacob**, and we face the question: "*what happens when the promise lands in the life of someone who is not an Abraham? someone who is more of a sneaky **schemer** than a faithful follower?*" Will the promise still 'take off' – will it survive?

Let's begin with the...

A. Crucial Context: which involves Sovereignty and Grace

Gen 25:21-27

²¹ Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she *was* barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. ²² But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If *all is* well, why *am I like* this?" So she went to inquire of the Lord.

²³ And the Lord said to her:

"Two nations *are* in your womb,
Two peoples shall be separated from your body;
One people shall be stronger than the other,
And the older shall serve the younger."

²⁴ So when her days were fulfilled *for her* to give birth, indeed *there were* twins in her womb. ²⁵ And the first came out red. *He was* like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau [literally meaning "Hairy"]. ²⁶ Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob [literally meaning "Supplanter/Deceiver"]. Isaac *was* sixty years old when she bore them.

²⁷ So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents.

- the story begins with the birth of twins
 - but they are definitely not identical twins!
 - the physical differences between “Red Hairy” and “Heel Grabber” right from birth indicate something of the wide differences which will increasingly differentiate their characters, personalities and destinies; and the wrestling match they engaged in within Rebekah’s womb becomes a dominant image for their relationship throughout all their lives
- but the crucial detail Scripture provides us at the beginning is the prophecy God delivers to Rebekah in vs. 23: “the older will serve the younger”
- this gives rise to the **tension** in the Jacob narratives which comes from two things:
 - 1) **God chose** and destined Jacob in a special way, even before his birth
 - 2) Jacob lives a **troubled life**, a direct result of this special choosing by God!
 - on many occasions Jacob has only himself to blame for his troubles; but at the same time we cannot avoid the uncomfortable implications here that his troubled life is a direct result of this special choosing by God!
- Jacob is the “third generation” in faith
 - **Abraham**: he had a strong, confident faith
 - **Isaac**: he lived an effective prosperous life of sonship
 - but **Jacob** lives in conflict and trouble all his days
 - ... 3rd generation-faith people often resemble Jacob, longing for blessing, sometimes conniving to get a blessing; fighting with people & fighting with God; at times harshly crippled in their struggles yet prevailing, like Jacob did because he *did* meet God; others not yet prevailing – waiting for a transformational meeting like Jacob’s wrestling at Penu’el (which we will see a little later)
- whether 1st, 2nd or 3rd generation, we too are **called & chosen**; and God doesn’t guarantee that this only involves happiness & well-being; Jesus himself promised us the opposite – “*in this world you will have trouble*” (John 16:33)
 - don’t be surprised “if the world hates you”
 - as Jesus said; “keep in mind that it hated me first.” (John 15:18)
- but also notice that in choosing the 2nd born son, **God challenges power relations**
 - in ancient societies of that day the rights of the firstborn son provided “the linchpin of an entire social and legal system” (as Brueggemann puts it)
 - Esau was the firstborn; but here God “violates the world’s notions of wisdom and strength” and chooses the *second* born, Jacob
 - I appreciate how Brueggemann summarizes God’s operational style:
 - ...*He operates against the odds, He goes against the grain, He loves the unlovely, and plants His promise in the unpromising*
- Paul’s remarks in 1 Cor. 1:27-30 provide a valuable commentary:
 - “Isn’t it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these “**nobodies**” to expose the hollow pretensions of the “somebodies”? That makes it quite clear that none of you can get by with blowing your own horn before God. Everything that we have –right thinking and right living, a clean slate and a fresh start – comes from God by way of Jesus Christ.” (The Message)

- God demonstrates his **grace** towards people who don't deserve to be included in the line of promise;
 - and he demonstrates his **sovereignty** as well by making the determinations he does
 - Rom. 9:10-13** tells us: "When she became pregnant by our one-of-a-kind ancestor, Isaac, and her babies were still innocent in the womb—incapable of good or bad—she [Rebecca] received a special assurance from God. What God did in this case made it perfectly plain that his purpose is not a hit-or-miss thing dependent on what we do or don't do, but a sure thing *determined by his decision*, flowing steadily from *his initiative*. God told Rebecca, "The firstborn of your twins will take second place." Later that was turned into a stark epigram: "*I loved Jacob; I hated Esau.*" (Malachi 1:2-3)
 - someone once complained to a pastor that this last verse was the hardest verse in the Bible for him to accept because he couldn't understand why God should hate Esau; the pastor replied that he found it harder to understand why God loved Jacob!
 - interestingly enough, it is most likely that we would be more attracted to *Esau* than to Jacob if they both showed up today!
 - **Esau** was a "man's man"! ...he would be on cover of sports mags & doing tv commercials
 - **Jacob** would most likely be considered a wimp, a "Mommy's boy"!
- ...and again, God's choice of Jacob runs *against the grain* of our natural choosing

- the gracious (or **grace**) character of God's covenant with Abraham is clearly seen in the fact that God chooses Jacob in spite of the fact that he turns out to be a deceiver and a schemer – *He operates against the odds, He goes against the grain, He loves the unlovely, and plants His promise in the unpromising*
- we are all unworthy of love, esp. God's love – but the wonderful truth is that God, in His eternal sovereignty, has chosen to shower His mercy and grace upon us, to give us the promised land (heaven) and the promised Savior
 - through mercy (when God does NOT give us what we DO deserve)*
 - and grace (when God GIVES us what we do NOT deserve)*
 - so too, God's choice of Jacob is a clear demonstration of His sovereign grace
 - Sovereignty** - God chooses the *unlikely*: Jacob the second-born
 - Grace** - God persists with the *unlovely*: Jacob the deceiver
- an elderly woman walked into a large dept store – when she met a salesperson she explained that she wanted to return a tire she felt was unsuitable for her car; the salesperson discovered she was longtime customer & she and her friends spent much of their time in his store
- but she was unhappy with the tire she had bought; the salesperson was surprised and asked if she had the tire with her – yes, it was in her car, but she had lost the receipt; "Well that's not a problem. You can return the tire and we'll give you a store credit. OK?"
- the woman agreed and the salesperson gave her a store voucher for the full value of the tire
- we may think there was nothing extraordinary about how this particular salesperson handled the situation – after all, he worked it out so the woman would still end up spending her money in his dept store; and would probably tell her friends how fairly she was treated – so, it was just good business, right?

- well, yes – but there's something else you should know – this incident happened in a store that doesn't sell automotive equip – not even tires! ...the sales person extended GRACE

GRACE – it's not about what you've done in the **past** or about what you can do in the **future**;
it's about what God – in His sovereignty – can do right **now**