

Blindness and Blessing

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Date: 03 July 2016

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[0 : 0 0] Now as we continue our progress through this section of Genesis, and dealing particularly with the life of Isaac and on into the life of Jacob, we have this perhaps one of the most famous episodes in the life of Isaac here.

And this seems at first glance a shameful episode of cruel deception, practiced on one of the saintliest men of the Old Testament.

And that is not untrue, because it was all of that, but the injustice at the human level must not blind us to the workings of God at the deeper and more spiritual level.

Isaac is at this stage at least a hundred years old. Remember that he was sixty years old when the twins he saw on Jacob were born.

We read that to chapter 25, verse 26. It says, And Isaac was threescore years old when she, that is, Rebekah, bare them, Esau and Jacob. And at the end of chapter 26, Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith, the daughter of Behi the Hittite, and Bashamath, the daughter of Elon the Hittite, which were a grief of mine unto Isaac and to Rebekah.

[1 : 1 5] So, sixty years old when the twins are born, and another forty years when Esau takes these two Canaanite wives. So he's at least a hundred years old, probably a wee bit more than that now.

And perhaps it is partly the grief of mind of these heathen wives now being part of the household, but he doesn't think he's got long to go.

At this time he expected his own death imminently. Verse 2, as we read, for example, where he says, I know not the day of my death.

And again at verse 7, That I may eat and bless thee before the Lord before my death. And clearly his family also thought much the same. You know, we didn't go on to read verse 41, but we would read there about how Esau hated his brother and how he wanted to kill him.

And he said, The days of mourning for my father are at hand. In other words, we expect Isaac to die any day soon. Then will I slay my brother Jacob. It wasn't an unreasonable assumption that a guy's a hundred years old, and then some.

[2 : 2 0] They don't expect him to last all that long. But in the end, old Isaac lives to be a hundred and eighty. So he's only just over halfway at this stage.

He's got a long way to go. Chapter 35, verse 28 tells us that he was a hundred and eighty when he died. So he's got a good seventy-five years to go at least at this stage, possibly a little bit more.

Now many people make the mistake of believing, if not literally, that they will go on forever. They live their lives as though their departure from this earth were a far distant event.

And as if there was loads of time. So they can still do whatever they want to do, and they still have time to maybe get right with God just before the end, before they slip off into eternity. People usually make the opposite mistake of thinking there's loads of time, and that they've still got plenty of strength, plenty of opportunity, plenty of mental alertness to do all the things they want to do.

Isaac is making the opposite mistake. He is assuring that he hasn't got long for this work. He thinks he's about to depart into eternity. In fact, in God's providence, he's got almost as much again of his life still to live.

[3 : 34] God's actual time is not necessarily our anticipated time. And God's purposes are not necessarily the same as our plans.

That's an important thing for us to remember. God's purposes are not necessarily the same as our plans. God's actual time is not necessarily our expected or anticipated time.

Clearly, Isaac had planned and wanted to confer the blessing on Esau, who clearly was his favourite. And it's possible that, you know, with all the subtleties and the layers of truth that there are in the Bible, you know, it's perhaps a wee sort of hint at the message here that's maybe a little suggestion that Isaac was just a little bit more than just physically blind.

Was he perhaps guilty of a bit of spiritual blindness to where his favourite son was concerned? You know, he would have known, just as everybody in the camp would know.

How, as we saw at the end of chapter 25, Esau despised his birthright. Jacob would have made sure that this was a known thing, that Esau had at least verbally sold his birthright to Jacob.

[4 : 54] So when he says, these two times hath he supplanted me, he took my birthright, now he's taken my blessing, verse 36. Isaac doesn't say, what's this about your birthright?

You know, he knows about it. Maybe Isaac is seeking to circumvent what's already happened. Maybe. We're perhaps speculating here. But the fact of the matter is that Isaac clearly appears either not to recognise or not perhaps to care as much as he should.

That Esau is showing all the signs of being a complete world man. He has despised the heritage of Abraham his grandfather, of Isaac his father, of the God whom they serve, of the life that they have led, of the covenant into which they have entered.

He has taken heathen wives, two of them, to himself, which are a grief of mine to his parents. He hasn't waited for their permission, for their arrangement, for any of these things. He's just gone right ahead and followed whatever the world and the flesh decided that he wanted.

He is showing all the symptoms of one who's got to have his need, his hunger, his appetite satisfied now. I want my food, I want my bread, I want my pottage.

[6 : 09] Give me it now. Yes, I have the birthright. Got to have it now. Never mind the future. Never mind the consequences. Never mind the covenant. Isaac would have known that. But he chooses not to see it.

Now in that, he would neither be the first nor the last indulgent parent who cannot see anything wrong in the children upon whom they don't.

Who would rather think that, oh yeah, God must be ready to bless them, no matter how much they turn their backs on the God of their fathers, no matter how much they clearly demonstrate no desire to follow the Lord.

It doesn't follow that just because they love their parents, that they love the God of their parents. Isaac, saint of the Lord that he was, almost certainly had a blind spot here.

Either that or else he was seeking to maybe just bend the rules and find a wee way around it. He loved Esau. Esau was his favourite.

- [7 : 13] Yes, he loved Jacob too, but Esau was his favourite son. A man's man. The hunter. The action man. Jacob was the quiet one, living in tents among the pots and pans and the women and so on.
- He couldn't see him. As a future leader of the tribe of the clan, inheritor of the common, Isaac thought he was doing what was best, but all the signs were there.
- I would suggest to you that as the Bible tells us, he wasn't just physically blind. There was a spiritual blindness there too. But for all that, he wasn't a fool.
- He wanted Esau to have the blessing rather than Jacob. Now to our modern eyes, this perhaps seems almost a fuss about, I thought quite a fuss about nothing, and certainly a fuss about a formality, worrying about a mere form of words.
- But in the time and culture of Canaan, the heads of the family effectively acted as the priest for his family.
- [8 : 15] And in the covenant line, which is the ancient church before the days of the law, blessing was truly and actually conveyed through the solemn benediction of the patriarch.
- The words pronounced made the fact a reality. I'll say that again. The words pronounced made the fact a reality.
- Now, we don't have many equivalents in this day and age. The nearest equivalent possibly is that may be either a baptism or perhaps at a wedding, let's say.
- The words of the minister or the registrar or whatever, when people take their promises to each other, and then finally the minister will say, I now pronounce you man and wife. Now, at the point when he says those words, that makes the seal of the marriage union.
- And until he speaks those words, they are not actually married. They are intending to be married. They are very nearly married. But until the minister or the registrar or whatever pronounces those words, it is not actually a dumb deed.
- [9 : 32] If the minister was about to pronounce them and then took a coughing fit and then fainted, and they're still not said, then that is only a prospective bride and groom.
- They go out to the church again, still not married, because it hasn't been spoken. It hasn't been uttered by the relevant party. Likewise, up until the last minute, until he says, I now pronounce you man and wife, somebody could theoretically still burst through the church board doors at the back, and say, don't marry him, marry me instead.
- And everything stops. But when the words are actually pronounced, then they are actually made man and wife. Once they are pronounced, the two have become, in the eyes of God, one, and it's too late.
- By the same token, once Isaac had pronounced the blessings on Jacob, it was too late. Real blessing had actually been conferred, and could not now be taken back, even by him, any more than a minister, five minutes after the marriage ceremony is concluded, and we're just about to sign the register, actually, I've changed my mind.
- Get back into the church again, and we'll undo this, because I don't want you to be married anymore. That's tough. He's done it. He said it. It's a done deal. It's finished. And so, likewise, here with Isaac, he doesn't have the power to take back the blessing that he has conferred any more than the rest.
- [10 : 56] He has the power to say, I've changed my mind. I don't want you to be married anymore. He cannot now change what has been done. But however much Isaac may have wanted to confer the blessing on Esau, and indeed that's what he thought he was doing, there can be no doubt that God intended it for Jacob.

Now, that is not to say that God approved of Jacob and Rebekah's methods, any more than God approved of David's killing Uriah and the Hittite just so that David could have Bathsheba, but nor did that alter God's plans for and blessing of Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba.

Nor does the unpleasantness of this episode, and it is a thoroughly unpleasant episode, but nor does its unpleasantness nullify God's great workings nor the power of his word to teach us something of salvation, even in such a passage as this.

In the third century, the North African bishop, St. Cyprian, famously said, He cannot have God for his father who has not the church for his mother.

He cannot have God for his father who has not the church for his mother. And we would recognize the church of Jesus Christ as our spiritual mother, in that sense, just as God is our father.

[12 : 26] And like Jacob, it is our father's blessing we need, but it is from our mother that we hear about it. Most of us do not, as infants, suddenly have a Damascus Road experience from the Lord before ever we enter a church or hear anything from Sunday school or from parents or whatever.

it is usually 99.999% of the time, it is through the church, our spiritual mother, that we hear about the blessing of God, the blessing of the father, the desire of the Lord to say, just as Jacob here hears about the prospective blessing through his mother, Rebecca.

And when Jacob, his mother, told him, just like us, when we hear about the Lord and his blessings through our mother, the church, we are full of all manner of excuses as to why this blessing should not be for us.

Now, obviously, God is unlike Isaac in that he is neither blind nor ultimately ever fooled, no matter how treacherous the lies we may try to tell.

But as we said before, even Isaac is not stupid. He too senses when people pretend to be what they are not and all too quickly present a cheap imitation of the reality they should have.

[13 : 58] How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? Now, this would not be a quick business. Even if you're taking the goats out of the enclosure near the tents, you know, and then you've got to butcher them and then you've got to prepare them and you've got to skin them, you've got to scrape off all the skin to the hides and they've got to be sort of dried sufficiently to then be tied onto the arms and the wrists and the smooth of the neck of Jacob.

This is a major undertaking. It is the work of practically a whole day. If Isaac sent Esau out at the break of day, it would be pretty much near the evening meal by the time that even Jacob comes in with his savoury meat, let alone before Esau comes back from the hunt and then starts the preparation.

You know, we read it and the narrative makes it sound almost as if it sort of popped in the microwave and pressed a couple of buttons and ping, there it is, here you go. Isaac, no, this is a day's work, even with the goats already there.

And yet he still says, well, how have you found it so quickly? He obviously expects Esau to be gone for perhaps a day or two on his hunt.

He's not fooled. The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. The voice is the voice of a hypocrite and a liar.

[15 : 22] The skin covering like that which covered Adam and Eve is from the dead carcass of an innocent beast slain to cover the nakedness of deceit.

The kiss is the kiss of the traitor. But as in Gethsemane, the treacherous kiss sealed and settled the final act.

There was no going back from that moment. So here with the kiss of Jacob it is when he kisses his poor trusting father that the old man smells the scent of his elder son and is finally convinced.

He has this, you know, so pathetic and yet so heartwarming phrase. He came here and kissed him. He smelled the smell of his raiment and blessed him and said, see, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed.

Now, the scent that a man gives out, it's unique to each individual. I mean, it's something that men in particular don't necessarily have a scent of much themselves.

[16 : 36] It may have been that Isaac, because he was now blind, his sense of smell may have been heightened. But I can remember, as I probably told you this illustration before, I can remember as a wee boy before I went to school when I was with my mum in one of the upstairs room, changing the beds and so on and all the dirty washing in a pile before she took it all downstairs.

So, throwing myself in the pile of clothes to kind of roll about, like bounce on the pile of clothes there. And I could smell the shirts and the jerseys of my dad. And it smelt of him.

And I don't mean that since, oh, James, it was really pongy or needed at the orbital. No, it was just the smell of my dad. And it was a comforting smell. And it was a daddy sort of smell.

And a little child, perhaps, has more sense of that. Possibly, females have more of a sense or understanding that most men probably don't recognize one another's kind of scent in that way when they're grown up.

But Isaac, he's old, he's blind, he recognizes the scent of his elder son as a field which the Lord hath blessed.

[17 : 46] That's what clinches it for him. This is the scent of Esau. But it is all a deception. It is because the garment of the elder brother clothes the unworthy imposter that Jacob is finally accepted and duly blessed.

Now we think, oh, that's terrible. Oh, that's dreadful. But here is a salvation message in it all, isn't it? Because we know our elder brother and what he has done for us.

We know that he is not ashamed to be called our brother because Hebrews tells us that chapter 2, remember, we often make reference to these verses, 11 and 12, for both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren in the midst of the church when I sing praise unto thee.

this is our elder brother and what he has done for us. It is clothed in his robe, his righteousness, that we are accepted.

Clothed in his righteousness alone, we are bold to stand before our heavenly father and seek to receive his blessing. Corinthians puts it this way, 2 Corinthians chapter 5, we read the first five verses, for we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God and house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

[19 : 32] For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven. If so be, that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened. Not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality of death might be swallowed up of life.

Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of his spirit, the foretaste of his spirit, of his blessing.

And Jeremiah, of course, tells us, chapter 23, verses 5 and 6, Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a king shall reign and prosper and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely, and this is the name whereby he shall be called the Lord, our righteousness. We have the blessing of God, not by an imposter's means, but by a legitimately approved means of heaven, but only insofar as we are clothed with the robe of righteousness of the elder brother.

[20 : 52] The Father, as it were, inhales the scent of purity, the scent of perfect obedience of the Lord, our righteousness.

And thus does he pronounce the blessing upon all thus clothed. Remember the parable Jesus told about the wedding banquet and all the guests that had been invited from the hedges and highways and so on, and everybody who came to that party would have been given a wedding garment at the door, and then the king says, there's a guy not wedding a garment.

Why is he not wedding a wedding garment? And he goes up to his ex-friend, how came a still here without a wedding garment? And he was speechless. And the king then said, oh come, give him one just now.

Give him one. No, he said, take him out. Cast him out. Bind him hand and foot and throw him out. Because there's only one way into that banquet, that's through the king's go-away.

And that is clothed in his garb of righteousness, his wedding garment, his perfect peace. It is in the garment of the elder brother that we alone are accepted and blessed.

[22 : 05] Now to go back to our narrative, when Esau returns, he is naturally distraught. Verse 34, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry and said to his father, bless me, even me also.

Oh my father. He is tearful at losing his father's blessing. And you know, Hebrews again, it tells us that he sought this blessing with tears. Hebrews 12, verses 16 and 17, lest there be any fornicator or profane person, profane as in worldly, or you know, only concerned with the things of this world, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

For you know how that afterward when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

And we read here that he lifted up his voice, verse 38, and wept. Yes, there were tears. Yes, he wanted to reverse what had been done, but by then, it was too late.

Now here we have him then pleading for this blessing and I would suggest to you the very real love which undoubtedly existed between father and son and which perhaps had blinded Isaac's spiritual discernment, that was as far as it went with Esau.

[23 : 30] I don't want to ascribe, and I don't think we should actually ascribe to Esau, oh, he only wanted what he could get out of it. He only wanted his father's blessing so that he could just live it up for himself or whatever.

No, I think Esau genuinely loved his father. And I think he genuinely wanted his father's blessing because it was the blessing of Isaac.

I think he wanted to please his father. In chapter 28, we see verses 8 and 9, Esau seeing that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac, his father.

Then went Esau unto Ishmael and took unto the wives which he had, Maharaf, the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebuchadnezzar, to be his wife. In other words, okay, you want me to take a wife from the extended family?

Fine, I'll go to Ishmael's family. I'll take one of them. I'm still missing the point. Ishmael is outside the covenant. Ishmael is not the child of promise.

[24 : 29] He's the child of the flesh. Just as Esau's mind and thoughts are on the world. But he is desperately trying to please his father. He wants his father to be proud of him.

But I would suggest to you that genuine as this love for Isaac is, what is breaking Esau's heart is the loss of the blessing of Isaac, the man.

There is no thought here of losing the blessing of God. When he seeks to please Isaac, he does it by adding to his two heathen wives yet another wife who is not quite of complete heathen background, but certainly with the covenant line.

And he just doesn't get it. It's like so many people looking at Christianity from the outside. They just don't get it. They think it's all about churches and books and Bibles and Psalms and hymns and outward worship and okay, this is what this people group choose to do but it's really just like a hobby like golf or knitting or whatever it might be, you know.

This is what they choose to do. Fine, fair enough if they want to do that. And don't see and recognize it is about a relationship. It is about the things of eternity.

[25 : 58] It is the most important thing in heaven and in earth and they just don't get it. They just don't see it. With the best will in the world, they speak a different language.

They see things with different eyes because these things are spiritually discerned and Esau just didn't have it.

That is why he was happy to sell his birthright for a bowl of pottage. That's why, yes, he's breaking his heart for the loss of his father's blessing but he doesn't see behind it to the need for his heavenly father's blessing.

He thinks he's just losing the blessing of Isaac. He doesn't see that he is being angled out of the covenant inheritance.

But as we saw there at the end of chapter 25, Esau despised his birthright. It's not that he hated it. It's not that he didn't, you know, give outward respect to it but it just didn't matter to him.

[27 : 03] It wasn't what was important. He was quite simply too worldly, too advanced, and too spiritually blind to see that with the blessing of Isaac had gone also the blessing of God.

Esau's love for Isaac, genuine as it was, let's not impute wrong motives to me, genuine as it was, that love would die. Isaac would die, Esau would die, his love for Isaac would die.

The Lord's love for his covenant children is a love which will never die. Now what we have here is that, is he not writing in Jesus? He had supplanted me these two times.

He took away my birthright, now he's taken away my blessing. Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me? Now this is tragedy because how could Isaac reserve a blessing for Esau when he had genuinely believed he was already giving Esau everything, everything that he confers upon Jacob, he thinks he's conferring on Esau.

He's given him the lot because he thinks he's giving it to his favorite son. Has the father only one blessing? Verse 38, O my father, hast thou but one blessing, my father, bless me, even me also.

[28 : 28] I would suggest to you and I would do so with all reverence that just like Isaac, the father, our heavenly father, has more than one blessing.

Matthew chapter 5, we read in the Sermon on the Mount, verse 45, and he maketh his son to rise on the evil and the good and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

In the Acts of the Apostles, when Paul and Barnabas are speaking to those in Lystra and Derbe, we read that they say of God, nevertheless, he left not himself without witness in that he did good and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

Who is he filling with food and gladness and blessing with the good things of heaven? All the nations, the heathens, the Canaanites, the unbelievers, the Listerns, the Derbeans, the Romans, the Greeks, not just the Israelites.

His blessings in this world, he confers upon all, he makes his son to rise on the evil and on the good. He sends the rain on the just and on the unjust. He does good, he gives us his blessings.

[29 : 44] There are those for whom, indeed there are multitudes for whom. This, alas, is as high as their ambitions ever rise.

The world and the flesh, if not perhaps the devil. But God does bless them. Yes, he gives them exactly what they desire.

Remember what Jesus said about the scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew 6. He said, When thou doest thine arms, do not send a trumpet before thee as the hypocrites do in the synagogue and in the streets, that they may have glory of men.

Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. Verse 5, When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogue and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.

Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. Verse 16, Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites so as sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.

[30 : 49] Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. You want the glory of men? You have your reward. You want the good things of this earth?

You want the blessings on the corn and the wine and the fruitful fields and all the riches that this world can give? You have your reward. God is good.

He's even good to the heathen, to the unbeliever. He blesses with the good things of this world. But that's all that you want. That's all that you ask. That's what you will receive.

That is as high as your ambitions rise. That is all that you desire from the God who has the power to give you anything and everything. And this is all you ask about.

The blessings of this world. Plenty of food and drink and wealth and the glory of men. Have the reward. Is that the depth or the shallowness of the blessing you desire?

[31 : 55] Is that one reason why when Jacob finally comes home in chapter 33 and verse 9, Esau is appeased. He says, Oh, I've got enough, brother. Jacob sends flocks and herds ahead of him as a present for Esau.

He says, Oh, no, keep them, brother. I've got enough. But really, he's glad to have them. That's not because he's an evil bad man. Esau shows huge generosity of spirit in receiving back Jacob who has only ever done him wrong in his life.

But Esau forgives him. Now that's great goodness on Esau's part but he's got everything he wants. He's got flocks and herds and men servants and maid servants.

He's got the blessing of this world. That's what he wants. He's content. He is appeased. There is an earth and blessing of fleeting, passing benefit.

And there is a heavenly blessing, a covenant blessing, the benefits of which may not be so clear, so clear, so quickly, but which will outweigh and outsoar and outlast all the glories of the world.

[33 : 09] Yes, the Father has more than one blessing, which kind I'm used to gain today. God meant Jacob to have his Father's true blessing, just as God means for us to have his own true blessing.

But though it is we who receive it and not another, we may approach our heavenly Father only under the cover of another's identity, another's robe, another's righteousness by which we are clothed and without which our own stench of sin and false righteousness would repel our heavenly Father.

But the scent of Christ, of the Lord, our righteousness, delights the heart of the Father. See, the smell of my Son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed.

And the Father inhales the scent of the purity and righteousness of his only beloved Son. He knows who we are.

He is not blind to our faults. And still he loves us. But he loves even more the one in whose name we come.

[34 : 44] We come in the name of Jesus who alone has paid the price of our sin, who alone has offered up the perfect sacrifice, who alone has taken the filthy rags of our sin and false righteousness and washed us in his blood and clothed us in his righteousness.

Us in whose name we come. And this is true salvation. This is true to be clothed in Christ.

Let's pray. Let's pray.