

Have you ever planned something, spent ages organising it, making sure every last detail is planned out, only to have things fall apart. One such day of course is a Wedding day. Mark and I certainly had spent a lot of time organising and planning our wedding day, so that it would be perfect. But as the day went by, it wasn't as smooth as we hoped. (P)To begin with I was late to the wedding, not just normal bride late, I was late over an hour. I wonder whether Mark started panicking. Then the van that was supposed to turn up to take the entire bridal party, all 10 of us, was actually about half the size that we ordered. (P)Our photo session ended up taking about an hour longer than we planned, and at the photos I was told to lean against that tree, it was covered in charcoal! Finally we were on our way to the reception, when our driver took the wrong turn and we arrived well over an hour late. Despite all our planning there were issues all through the day.(P) Of course I still had a fantastic time and we did get married. But even the best plans can have problems.

(P) God's plan being unveiled

Well here in Genesis, in the midst of God's plan being played out we see problems that could frustrate God's promises and plans, but we see that God is in control, and his plans and promises are fulfilled.

What a messy story we read today! This is an ugly story isn't it? (P) Chapter 27 tells the tragic story of Rebekah and Jacob who conspired together to steal away the blessing Isaac intended for Esau. This story is full of drama, comic relief and the conclusion is nasty.

Did you notice in this story, that unlike many other places in the bible, the author doesn't specifically comment or condemn the wrong things that are done. The narrative is there for us to make our own conclusions. Each individual is at fault, except the one character in the story, God. He is strangely absent in the thinking and attitudes in this story. His only mention in the passage today is part of Jacobs deceit.

(P) But despite God's lack of mention I want to suggest that this story is important not because of who Jacob is, but because of who his God is. This story reveals to us God's character. (P) God clearly loved and blessed this family and this story painfully shows their imperfections and sins to demonstrate his faithfulness, the grace of God, and to demonstrate his sovereign control.

I'm not going to retell the whole story today, especially because we've just read it. I do however want to point out a couple of things that I'd like to reflect on about God's character from this story.

(P) The first thing that this story tells us about who God is that he is faithful in keeping his promises.

We've seen in genesis so far... how the universe is created by God speaking, we've seen the first man and woman reject the God who created them. This rejection of God brought brokenness and sin into this world. We saw that God was so heartbroken from the great

wickedness of humans that he sent the flood. However, It wasn't total destruction because God saved Noah, a man who obeyed and listened to God's word. We meet Abraham. God promises him that he will be made into a great nation, his name will be great, and that he will pour out so much blessing that it will flow out to all nations. This promise brings hope to the world, as it promises the restoration of the brokenness in the world. Finally, when Abraham was 100 years old his son Isaac was born. God's promise was kept, and Abraham and Sarah begin to build a nation.

(P) Please read with me Genesis chapter 26:2-5,

The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. ³ Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. ⁴ I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring^[a] all nations on earth will be blessed,^[b] ⁵ because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees and my instructions." ⁶ So Isaac stayed in Gerar.

God promises to Isaac, the same promise he gives to Abraham, and so through Isaac and Rebekah, we expect to see these promises and plans continue.

(P) Please read with me from Genesis ch 25:19 is where we begin the story of Isaac and his family.

This is the account of the family line of Abraham's son Isaac.

Abraham became the father of Isaac, ²⁰ and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Pad-dan Aram^[c] and sister of Laban the Aramean.

²¹ Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.

This sounds very similar to what happened with Abraham and Sarah doesn't? Rebekah is barren. Isaac prayed to God, and after 20 years of marriage, Rebekah became pregnant. This picture, a barren woman who becomes pregnant is a sign to show that God is working in their lives.

But it isn't smooth sailing from that point. Before these boys were born there was struggle between them. While Rebekah was pregnant there was painful, possibly dangerous

movement inside of her, SO Rebekah goes to God and asks him what's happening? This is what the Lord says
Genesis 25:23

²² The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.

"Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."¹

God here tells Rebekah about her children, and what he has planned for them:
God says that

- From these two children nations will be made.
- The two children will not be equal – one will be stronger than the other.
- The two children will not follow the traditional custom - the older will serve the younger.

God is Faithful to his promises. God has promised that through Isaac and Rebekah, that they will have many descendants. Here God promises Rebekah that she will have two nations. Indeed we see this in our story of Genesis, from both Esau and Jacob come two nations, but it will be through the younger child in which the promise of Abraham will be passed down to.

(P) Another characteristic of God that we see in our story today is that he is a God who is gracious to whom he chooses.

You see, This concept of the older serving the younger is not new. We see it in the story of Cain and Abel, we see it in Isaac being favoured over Ishmael, and here now God is promising that the older will serve the younger.

(P)What kind of characteristics do you think of when you look for a leader, we look for the smartest, the strongest, good personality. The most outstanding person, right? Throughout the bible there are many examples where the younger, or the weaker tends to rise above the oldest or the stronger. God chooses the weak things of the world to shame the strong, this is so that no one can boast in themselves. We are to learn that it is God who does the work for us, it is not anything that we have done. (P)Jacob does not do anything to deserve the blessing of God, God chose him before he was born. This highlights God's amazing grace that he has for us.

(P) The third thing that we learn about God is that God is in control, despite the sin of Isaac's family.

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The Holy Bible: New International Version (electronic ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), Ge 25:23.

Isaac allows his desires to rule his decisions.

Isaac's old, can't see, and thinks it is time to give his blessing before death comes. So what does he do? Well he calls for his favourite son – Esau. Did you notice, that this blessing is done in secret – no witnesses around, no other family around, well apart from Rebekah hiding around the corner. This isn't the normal custom of passing on the inheritance, there usually is at least other family members around, but not here. His desire is for his eldest son to obtain the blessing, even though he was going against God's words.

Well what about Rebekah? In this story she most likely has in mind God's word about her two boys, she has the right intention, but instead of going to talk with Isaac about it, or going to God about it, the love she has for her favourite son Jacob leads her into devising a plan which ultimately destroys her family relationships. She plots against her husband and eldest son, and her actions gets her favourite son into trouble.

Well how about Esau? Just from this story he seems to be the one who gets the worst deal. But there's a bit of background we're missing from this story, that I think is important to help us understand what's really happening. I briefly mentioned it earlier, and it's got to do with him selling his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup. You can read about it in Genesis 25. This birthright included not only the material possessions of his family, but it also included a relationship with God of Isaac and the blessings that came with it. For Esau to give up his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup, shows that he doesn't really care about his father's inheritance. He did not value the position of being eldest. For him, his desire for tasty stew was more important. So perhaps some of our sympathy for him has evaporated in light of this? He's not as deserving of the blessing as we may have first thought. By chapter 27, it is too late for Esau, he had given his birthright up to Jacob, and he ends up getting nothing.

And well Jacob, he's no better than his brother Esau. Jacob's worried about this plan, not about the problem of lies and trickery, but that he will get caught. He's worried about a curse being brought upon him. He doesn't seem to worry about lying to Isaac, or that he will steal his brother's position. It's amazing isn't it? God had promised great things for Jacob, instead of waiting for God to give it to him he attempted to grasp them by lies.

What do we have at the end of this story? A tragic ending! Jacob is sent away from his home and family to some distant relatives, ultimately because Esau wants to kill him. What will Esau's relationship be between his parents now that they've both helped him lose his blessing and inheritance. Rebekah's lost her favourite son Jacob, in fact she dies without ever seeing Jacob again. What about her relationship with her husband Isaac- she deceived him, went against his wishes. And what about Isaac, his favourite son gets nothing, his child who he blesses leaves him, I guess the only good thing in this story is that Isaac gets to eat two bowls of tasty stew – the kind that he likes.

But what we see in throughout all this drama is that God clearly loved and blessed this family and this story painfully shows their imperfections and sins to demonstrate the

grace of God, his faithfulness and his sovereign control. Even with all the sin and lies done by each member of this family God's promise is fulfilled with Jacob taking the inheritance and continuing the promise God gave Abraham and we see this promise further fulfilled as we read more of the story of Jacob next week.

So what about us? How is this story going to impact the way that we live?

Well first, we should not be shocked at the ugliness and sin in this story. This story clearly shows the nature of humanity – it is full of disobedience to God. We should not be shocked at the sin and ugliness in our world, we should not be shocked at the sin and ugliness in our own lives. We have in common with Jacob and his family the brokenness that taints our relationship with God and each other. We are people who reject God.

This story of Jacob should not leave us in despair and darkness though. For the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, is the God of sinners. He can be our God too. Just as he chose Jacob, he chooses and invites you to let him be your God, for we have seen in this story that despite sinfulness and brokenness, God is a God who is gracious, faithful, and in control.

For me, To know God character gives me confidence, peace and assurance, I know that I can trust him in all things. What about you? What does it mean for you to know that God is gracious, faithful and in control?

You might be someone that worries about not being good enough to be saved, and that your sinfulness is too much for God? Jacob did nothing to deserve his blessing, he even did things that meant he didn't deserve the blessing, yet God kept his Promise to him. So we should read this story about Jacob's God and take it as an assurance that he is strong enough to overcome any of our sins and he will keep his promise to us.

As I tried to think about how this story in Genesis applies to my life, I thought what is the blessing that God promises us? It's an eternal inheritance which is waiting for us in heaven. It is a blessing that can never be stolen from you, or perish. It is a blessing of living with God for eternity, under his rule, in God's awesome place, and with all of God's people. God doesn't promise that our life on earth will be perfect, with no hardships, because we still live amongst sin. But God has promised that one day he will return and that he will judge evil and for those who believe in Him they will have eternal life.

What do we do with this blessing God gives us?

Well we must value it and respond appropriately to it!

In our story today we saw that Esau did not value God's blessing, he sold his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup. The blessing that God gives us is the most valuable thing we could ever have in this world. It is more valuable than a career, more than our family, more than whatever worldly thing we desire, These worldly things only last for a little while. But God and his blessing will last forever. Don't let your love for these worldly things take you away from knowing the God of grace and mercy who gives you eternal life.

If you're a Christian and believe in Jesus, then I think you would agree with me that you value the blessing that God gives you. Today, I want to ask us the question – how is this shown in your life. I want to briefly suggest three ways which I think will encourage us to not just know in our mind the value of God's blessing to us, but to help this knowledge to flow into our actions.

1. Are we Thankful and grateful to God for what he has given us, or do we whinge and complain, when things don't go quite the way we want? Being thankful to God shows how much we value who he is and what he has done for us.
2. Are we engaged in reading God's word to gain more understanding of who God is, and what he teaches us through his word? Are we reading it because it's valuable to us, it is important for us to listen and obey God's word.
3. Lastly, if this blessing is valuable to us, then we would want to tell it to the people we know? Are we sharing the blessing that we have received in Jesus Christ, to our friends and family who don't know the blessing.

I don't know about you, but I am glad that this story is not about how good and perfect Jacob is, but that it is about how good and perfect the God of the universe is.

Let me pray