

Origin Stories: It's Complicated, Genesis 23-27, 5/12/24

How many of you would say you come from a normal family? You hesitate because the question is, what's normal? They say every family is normal until you get to know them, and every family is a bit weird, they do things that are strange to anyone from outside of that family. I remember the first time Shannan came over to the Keeler house when my mom was cooking jumbo shrimp and Shannan watched with wide eyes as the four of us Keeler men counted the shrimp on each other's plate to make sure it was all even and arguing our case for who should get the extra shrimp. She's like, "What was that about?" And I was like, "Oh you mean your family doesn't fight over shrimp?" Every family is a little off in one degree or another. Although for some of us, it's more than a 1 or 2 degrees off...some of us we come from very dysfunctional, broken, or estranged families. For some of us that's why Mother's Day is complicated, because family is complicated. Today in our Origin Stories series, we are going to meet another dysfunctional family, the family of Isaac and Rebekah and their twin boys, Esau and Jacob. From their family story we are going to see a surprising encouragement and a sober warning for our lives and families today.

Let me remind you where we are in the story. In Genesis 12, God comes to one man, Abraham and chooses to bring his plan of salvation to the world through his family. And as this family line continues throughout the Biblical narrative, we learn that in every generation there would be a messianic seed. One child in every generation would be the son of promise. Until there will be The Seed, The Son of Promise who would be the Savior, that is Jesus Christ.

And so Abraham has two sons- Isaac and Ishmael- one of them, Isaac is the son of promise. In Genesis 25 Isaac and his wife Rebekah have twins. And the question will be, which one will be the son of promise? Let's fast forward to moment that appears to answer that question: Genesis 27 starting in verse 1.

When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him, "My son." "Here I am," he answered. ² Isaac said, "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death.

³ Now then, get your equipment—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me.⁴ Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die."

Well you say, I guess that answers our question. Isaac is ready to bestow Esau as the son of promise- he would receive God's promise of land, blessing, and people. And traditionally this would make sense because he was the first born by a few minutes, following the tradition of what is called "primogeniture" the firstborn receives the inheritance.

[Blank Slide] Ah, but not so fast because here's the rub. Back in Genesis 25, we learn that Rebekah was feeling in her womb that things seemed off and she prays and asks God what's going on, and he tells her, one- surprise you are having twins! But also- two nations are in your

womb, and the older, that is Esau, shall serve the younger, that is Jacob. In a surprising twist, God says it's the younger son, not the firstborn that would become the son of promise.

Certainly, Rebekah would have told Isaac what God had said, and yet, Isaac was determined not to bless Jacob, whom God had chosen, but determined instead to bless Esau. Now you say, "Nate, wasn't that disobedience to God?" It was. You say, "Well then why would he do that?"
Genesis 25: ²⁷ The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents.

These twins couldn't have been more different. Esau was a walking masculine stereotype, he was a burly, grunting, rough and tumble outdoorsmen. In modern day, he would have had a big belt buckle, bushy beard, and gun rack in his pickup truck. Jacob on the other hand is painted with a very different brush: Jacob is brain not brawn. No callouses on this man's hands. He's quiet, strategic, indoorsy fellow. His tool was a spatula not a bow and arrow. And there's nothing wrong with either of the personalities and interests of either of these boys, they came out of the womb different. And if you have kids, you probably know just how different your kids (even twins) can be from one another. That's not the problem. The problem is ²⁸ *Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.* The problem is favoritism. Their parents had clear favorites, and Isaac allowed his preference for Esau (and his carnivorous appetite) to overshadow his obedience to God's will. Let me just say moms and dads and those who will be one day moms and dads: Do you want to introduce dysfunction and resentment and chaos into your family? Do you want to guarantee your kids will be in therapy one day talking about you? Play favorites. Show preferential treatment and you will introduce a toxin of dysfunction into your home. Love your kids for how God made them and celebrate their differences.

So what happened? Back to chapter 27:5 we see that Rebekah was eavesdropping on this conversation between Isaac and Esau. And she was like, "Oh I don't think so! Not on my watch!"
⁵ *When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back,* ⁶ *Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau,*

⁷ *'Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the Lord before I die.'* ⁸ *Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you:*

⁹ *Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it.* ¹⁰ *Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies."*

We find out that she even goes as far as stealing Esau's cloak for Jacob to wear and cover the smooth-skinned Jacob with goat hair so that he smelled and felt like Esau in order to trick poor old blind Isaac. This is like the Corleone Family from the Godfather level of dysfunction! [Blank Slide] Now, this shouldn't surprise us if we know what happened several years earlier between Jacob and Esau in chapter 25. Jacob had lured Esau into selling him Esau's birthright, which

would have ensured Jacob that he would legally receive the double portion of his father's inheritance, and in a moment of impulsivity and foolishness, Esau trades it to him for a bowl of red stew. Now this was cunning and cold for sure. But what Rebekah is now scheming? This kicks it up several notches. It was deceitful, it was treacherous, it was lying, it was stealing...this was illegal.

You say, "Nate, what was she thinking? Why would she trick her husband like this? Why would she put Jacob in a position to be deceitful like this with his own father?" Well, she's thinking she knows God's will that Jacob, not Esau, would be the son of promise. And she loved Jacob more than Esau, and so she's thinking, "I need to help God out. Ends justify the means, even if I need to lie, cheat, and steal to get it." Notice, there is no praying and asking God for help. It's taking control and leaving God out. And this kind of end-around thinking is dangerous in our Christian lives. God will never ask us to compromise our integrity or go against His Word in order to bring about His will in our lives. God cares not only about the outcomes but the process in our lives. Well the deception works all according to plan. ³⁰ *After Isaac finished blessing him, and Jacob had scarcely left his father's presence, his brother Esau came in from hunting.*

³¹ *He too prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father. Then he said to him, "My father, please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing."*

³² *His father Isaac asked him, "Who are you?" "I am your son," he answered, "your firstborn, Esau."* ³³ *Isaac trembled violently and said, "Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him—and indeed he will be blessed!"*

³⁴ *When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, "Bless me—me too, my father!"* v.36 *Then he asked, "Haven't you reserved any blessing for me?"* And the answer is no, not only was a father's verbal blessing legally irrevocable in those days, but because Isaac knew the prophecy, he knew God's will and I believe it settled on him in that moment that God's sovereign will is always bigger than the schemes of man.

So an embittered and enraged Esau vows to kill his brother Jacob. ⁴² *When Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Your brother Esau is planning to avenge himself by killing you. ⁴³ Now then, my son, do what I say: Flee at once to my brother Laban in Harran.*

⁴⁴ *Stay with him for a little while until your brother's fury subsides. ⁴⁵ When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I'll send word for you to come back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?"* Little did Rebekah know that this would be the last time she ever saw her beloved son Jacob again.

[Blank Slide] That's as far as we're going to go in our study of Genesis today. Some of you like to be entertained by watching shows about very dysfunctional families, I guess it makes you feel better about your own family...But we didn't just come to church today to get entertained by this ancient dysfunctional family, there are important spiritual lessons for our lives and our

families today. Now, the irony of this sermon falling on Mother's Day does not escape me. I was talking to my brother and asked him to pray for me because I'm preaching this story on Mother's Day. And he said, "Well normally on Father's Day the sermons beat up on dads and tell them they need to be doing a better job, meanwhile on Mother's Day the moms are told how amazing and wonderful they are. Maybe it's their turn!" Ha... well, my hope is that we all can find encouragement and challenge in this message.

Let's first agree that everybody in this story sinned big time. Can we agree to that? Isaac sinned through favoritism and by setting out deliberately to disobey God and bless Esau instead of Jacob. Rebekah also sinned through favoritism and by plotting and scheming and deceiving her husband. Jacob sinned by being inhospitable and callous to his brother and going along with Rebekah's plot and then bold face lying to his father. And we might say that Esau sinned or at least was unwise when his impulsive appetites got the best of him selling his birthright and he certainly sinned in planning in his heart to murder his brother in a premeditated and deliberate way.

But there's a surprising encouragement in this. Because while this is a very dysfunctional family, we have a very functional God. **In the end, God's sovereign grace and will prevail.** God's grace and will override all their foolishness, all their deceit and disobedience. In the end, Jacob was preeminent over Esau. And in the end, Jacob inherited the Abrahamic covenant, just the way the sovereign plan of God intended it. And in the end, Jacob's descendants became the people of Israel, God's chosen people, who brought about the promised seed of the Messiah Jesus Christ, in whom we obtain grace and become heirs of the promise of salvation, just the way God's sovereign grace and will intends it. In the end, God's sovereignty prevailed because, friends, **God's sovereignty is always bigger than man's sin.**

God's sovereignty, praise the Lord, is always bigger than man's sin. And that gives me great comfort. I don't know about you, but it gives me great comfort. When I look around at the evil plotting and scandals of the powers that be and injustices in our world today. When I see nations warring against each other and the existential threats of dangerous ideologies, AI and nuclear weapons, Russia and China, it gives me great comfort that God's sovereign plan will prevail in this world. Amen? And as Christians we must find our footing in this core doctrine.

But this is also a great comfort when we look not only out there, but in here...at our own foolishness, our own sin and mistakes and still see God's sovereign grace and will overriding our sin. I look back over the foolish decisions and willful rebellion in my life. I think about the patience of God with me in my sin and failures in my life. I shouldn't be here, I shouldn't have the blessings that God has given me, and yet God's sovereign grace in Jesus and God's sovereign plan for my life is greater than my sin. Praise God!

Some of us need to be encouraged by this today because you have regrets from your past or shame that has its hooks in you. The surprising encouragement of this story is that God's bigger than our sin! **2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!** Some of us need to live in that freedom and stop clinging to the

regrets. Maybe you have parenting regrets. If Jesus has forgiven you, you need to forgive you. If Jesus has given you grace, you need to receive that grace. If He has restored you, you need to live out of that restoration. Find your footing in this core doctrine of God's sovereign grace and will.

And this is true. But there is also a sober warning. If we think that this family got away with all of this sin without consequences even though God's sovereign plan prevailed, we are grossly mistaken. **Sin always has consequences.** This family was shattered because of all this sin. Jacob and Esau were estranged for 20 years, and Jacob had to look over his shoulder wondering if Esau would try to kill him one day. Rebecca and Isaac's relationship was never the same again, and Rebecca never saw her beloved son Jacob again. And later, Jacob's sons would deceive him, just like he had deceived his father Isaac, and they would carry out the same kind of treachery towards their brother Joseph that Jacob had carried out towards his brother Esau. The point is that even though God's sovereignty always triumphs in the end, as it did in this situation, sin has consequences.

And this is true under the old covenant and it's true in the new covenant. Because the Bible says God is the same yesterday, today and forever. One of the most sober warnings comes from **Galatians 6: ⁷Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.**

And so as followers of Christ, even though we are God's adopted children, and even though he loves us as his children through Christ, and if you trust Jesus there is no condemnation- we escape the penalty of eternal death because Jesus took our ultimate consequences. Praise God! BUT...we must never forget that God is a holy God, that God is a righteous God, who governs his world with cause-and-effect principles. You and I cannot violate the word of God with impunity any more than Isaac could, Jacob could, or Rebecca could.

Now, it is true that sometimes God does in his mercy, soften the consequences of our sin. That is true. But there are also times where God in his righteousness and justice decides he's going to leave the consequences of our sin on our life, and the problem is when you and I commit the sin, we don't know how God's mercy and justice will work out. And that's why David prayed, **Psalm 19:13 Lord, Keep your servant back from presumptuous sins.** What's a presumptuous sin? It's a sin where we know we're doing wrong, but where we presume, we presume that God will free us from all the consequences of what we're doing. It's a sin where we say, "Hey Lord, I know I shouldn't be doing this, but I'm going to come back and confess it, and when I come back and confess it, you're going to not hold me accountable, and I can go on as if nothing happened." Oh, be careful. God cannot be mocked.

Are there presumptuous sins in your life right now? Maybe you are in a sinful relationship with someone you have no business being with but you think God will just turn a blind eye. Or maybe it's the sin of pornography that has its grip on you that you think won't have any lasting consequences. Or you have been drinking more and more and so far it hasn't caught up to you and you presume that because it hasn't everything is fine. Or having you been lying to people,

thinking no one is going to find out. C.S. Lewis used to say a little lie is like a little pregnancy. You might not notice it at first but as the months go on it's apparent that there's a pregnancy. And so it is with a lie. As years go on, the lie will become more and more apparent. Most of the time, people end up in my office with their lives blown apart because of ongoing, presumptuous sins that they didn't think were a big deal until the sin they had been sowing reaped a harvest.

Now, here's the good news. **Joel 2:25 *I will restore the years the locust have eaten.*** God can and will use even our poor decisions, even our presumptuous sin and its consequences and redeem it, he can use it to accomplish more than we can imagine. He can use it like he has in my life as a testimony of his power, his forgiveness that can bless others who are caught in the same sins. But he can only redeem it if we repent- we come to him and the people we have sinned against and we confess this sin, not just with our lips but from our heart. Committing ourselves to him.