

June 17, 2012

Jacob
The Blessing
Genesis 27:25-34

Opening Words: This is sermon number three of my summer sermon series on Jacob. In the first two weeks we have learned some basic facts about his life. First, we learned something about his heritage. His grandfather was Abraham and his father was Isaac. Second, we learned he had a fraternal twin brother, Esau. He was the one who was born red and hairy. (He must have been a handsome lad.) Last week, we learned Jacob was an opportunist, trading the birthright for a bowl of stew. This week we learn that Jacob was a cheater. That is why I have called this entire sermon series: *From Cheater to Leader*. May God give you ears to hear this morning's scripture lesson, Genesis 27:25-34. Let me call this message *The Blessing*.

Genesis 27:25-34 25 Then he said, "My son, bring me some of your game to eat, so that I may give you my blessing." Jacob brought it to him and he ate; and he brought some wine and he drank. 26 Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come here, my son, and kiss me." 27 So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said, "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed. 28 May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness— an abundance of grain and new wine. 29 May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed." 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!"

The fame and popularity of Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen rested largely on his children's fairy tales, written over a period of some 37 years and translated into scores of languages. Andersen was well aware of this fact -- so much so that late in life, he told the musician who was to compose a march for his funeral, "Most of the people who will walk after me will be children, so make the beat keep time with little steps." My we never forget our children are following us. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

You know it is true. In the perfect family we love all of our children equally and encourage them to explore their individuality. That is not happening in this story. My original title for this sermon was *Portrait of a Dysfunctional Family*. That title summarizes Isaac's family. The text says it clearly. The twins are not loved equally by their parents. Rebecca loved Jacob more because he liked the easy life around the tents. In other words, he was a momma's boy. Isaac loved Esau more because he was a manly man. He was always out in the woods. This is the bottom line. The parent's unequal love for their sons divided the family. There was a flaw in the family unit. It is my experience that family problems do not just disappear in time. It is my experience that family problems intensify in time. Isaac's family problems are in full bloom. He is near the end of his life and both sons are longing to receive his blessing. So this is the question.

What was the blessing? The blessing was a formal passing of the mantel. It was usually passed from father to the oldest son. With the blessing came authority and resources. First, the one being blessed was assuming the leadership responsibilities for the family. Second, with the extra responsibilities came a double share of father's inheritance. Esau has the inside track for the blessing. First, he is the oldest son. Second, he is favored by Jacob. For these reasons Isaac intends to give Esau the blessing. However, this entire sermon series is called "From Cheater to Leader." We are told today that our hero Jacob lies and cheats his brother out of the blessing. In the end, it is Jacob who walks away with both the respect and the cash. This entire story underscores the fact that Isaac had a dysfunctional family. How dysfunctional is your family?

Today, I don't want to talk about your dysfunctional family. Instead, I want to help you maximize your family. There is a man by the name of Dr. Gary Smalley. He wrote a book called *The Blessing*. In that book he says there are four ingredients needed in every home. If these four ingredients are present then we have better chance of maximizing our family potential. If these ingredients are absent then we have a chance to be as happy as Esau, who was bitter and angry. Each one of these ingredients is present in this morning's scripture lesson. So if you are ready to begin say, "**Amen!**" I am going to be quick with the points and end with a familiar illustration.

A Meaningful Touch

The first ingredient is a meaningful touch. Don't think about the Jerry Sandusky case. Think about holding hands with the person you love the most. In verse 22, prior to our reading, it says Jacob went to his father. In verse 26 it says, *"Then his father Isaac said to him, 'Come here, my son, and kiss me.'*" This is not an isolated case. When we lay hands on someone, when we kiss someone, when we embrace someone, we are communicating to them that they are loved and accepted. In the tenth chapter of Mark, mothers are bringing their children to Jesus so he could bless them. So he could touch them. Jacob received the blessing when he was forty years old. He wasn't too old to be touched by his father. Your adult children still need to be loved and accepted.

I was always taught when you make a hospital visit remember three letters: STP. The S stands for short. The patient is sick. The T stands for touch. Touching the patient because it makes it sincere. The P stands for pray. The patient because they need God. When was the last time you touched your children? If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

A Spoken Word

The second ingredient is a spoken word. In the story the touch is backed up with the words. Verse 27 says, *"So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said, 'Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field.'*" I would not recommend quoting Isaac. Today, smelling like a field is not a good thing! However, I would recommend you express your love to your children.

Several weeks ago, I confessed there are two things my father never said to me. The first was I love you. The second was I proud of you. On this Father's Day, I will confess those absent words have left a hole in my soul. It is too late for my father. It is not too late for you. Tell the young in your life just how much you care for them. If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

A High Value

The third ingredient is a high value. Verse 28 says, *"May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness— an abundance of grain and new wine."* What does that verse mean? Isaac is saying to his son, "You are special!" In the Old Testament you didn't receive your blessing in heaven. You received your blessing in this world. The more you had the greater the blessings. The less you had the fewer the blessings. Isaac said to his son, *"May God give you heaven dew and earth riches."* That is how he communicates his son's high value. How do you communicate high value to your children?

It was reported that eleven millionaires went down on the Titanic. Major A. H. Peuchen left \$300,000.00 in money, jewelry and securities in a box in his cabin.

"The money seemed a mockery at that time," he later said. "I picked up three oranges instead." How valuable are your children to you today? Barbara Bush once said, *"At the end of your life, you will never regret not having passed one more test, not winning one more verdict or not closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a friend, a child, or a parent."* If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

A Glorious Future

The fourth and final ingredient is a glorious future. Verse 29 says, *"May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed."* Isaac is saying to his son, "Your future is bright!"

Billy Sunday once said, *"More men fail through lack of purpose than lack of talent."* Each one of us was born for a purpose. One of the most challenging things you will ever do is help a young person in your life discover their divine purpose. Is anyone one here still trying to figure out your divine purpose? If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

It is hard to be original after eighteen years. Some of you have heard this story more than once. Some of you can tell the story better than I. However, I am going to tell it again for two reasons. First, the woman in this story, Norma Marcum, changed my life. I would not be here today if it wasn't for her. I get emotional just thinking about that day. Second, this story illustrates those four points perfectly. There is a meaning touch, a spoken word, a high value and a glorious future. This is the story.

I was in seminary and I was having a bad day. My parents did not want me to go into the ministry so they didn't support me financially. (They didn't support me in any way.) I was working two jobs to pay the bills. I ministered a small membership church outside of Danville, Kentucky and I worked on a parishioner's tobacco farm. However, I was still poor and in debt. I worried about paying those student loans back. Did I mention there was illness at home? Because of my work, I was behind in my studies. I remember being tired and overwhelmed. I was completely defeated and I didn't think I could continue. As I made that thirty mile drive home from the school, I made a decision that would change my life. I was going to quit school and get a real job. There was a sense of relief just thinking about leaving school. I needed to talk to someone that day but there were very few people to listen to me. I did what I have always done. I turned to a church member for help.

Her name was Norma Marcum. She was a cook at the local school. Her husband, Glen, owned a small local grocery store in Bryantsville, Kentucky. They were not known for their great wealth or their housekeeping skills. (Their home was a mess.)

However, they were known as good people who would do anything for their neighbors. When I was in graduate school they adopted me and made me their third son. She was the first person I had to tell.

When I pulled in her driveway I saw her looking out the window. When I walked into her house she said, "Russ, what are you doing here? Don't you have things to do?" When she looked at my face she said, "What's wrong? Get a cup of coffee." I sat in my usual chair and tried to make small talk. Mrs. Marcum didn't want small talk. She wanted to get to the heart of the matter. She asked me again, "What's wrong?" The emotions of that day almost choked off my words but I forced them out. "I going to quit school, move back to Ohio and get a real job. " She didn't say a word. Instead, she put out her cigarette and made me a sandwich. When it arrived, I ate it and began talking. I told her about school. I told her about me debt. I told her about my home. I told her about my parent's opinion about my calling. I told her everything. When I got done talking she looked at me and said, "Can I say something?" Emotionally spent, I just looked at her. She looked at me and said, "Russ, give me you hands." She leaned across the table and took both of my hands. She said, "I can't give you any money but I will say this. Someday, you are going to be a great man. God has given you the gifts to be a fine preacher. People are going to be blessed because of you! Don't waste it. Go home and get some sleep. Get up tomorrow and try again." I did what she said. I went home. I got some sleep and the next day I tried again. I don't tell you that story because I think I am a great person. (You know better.) And there are days I don't think I have helped anyone. I tell you that story because Norma Marcum changed my life!

How many lives are going to change? If you want to change someone's life then don't just buy them something. If you want to change someone's life spend some time with them. Don't be afraid to touch them. Don't be afraid to express your love for them. Don't be afraid to tell them of their high value. Don't be afraid to tell them the world needs them. This is Father's Day. How are you going to celebrate? And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**