

June 3, 2012

Jacob

Do You Eat Apricots?

Genesis 25:19-26

**Opening Words:** It has become my custom to preach on a single Old Testament character during the summer months. I do this for two reasons. First, we live in Biblically illiterate times. We simply do not know the Bible. Second, I believe in the witnesses of both the Old and New Testament. Our personal theology will never be complete without looking at the whole Bible.

In past summers we have looked at the lives of Abraham, Elijah, Esther, Joseph, Moses, Nehemiah and Ruth. This summer we are going to examine the life of Jacob. I have called this sermon series *From Cheater to Leader*. His story is found between the twenty-fifth and fiftieth chapters of Genesis. I hope you take the time to read his story so you can be prepared to hear each message. Great preaching is more possible when everyone is prepared to both speak and listen. May God give you ears to hear this morning's scripture lesson, Genesis 25:19-26. Let me call the message "Do You Eat Apricots?"

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**Genesis 25:19-26** 19 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 Paddan Aram 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. 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. 23 The LORD said to her, "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." 24 When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. 25 The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. 26 After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.

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Let me begin this sermon series with a question: Do you like apricots? You did not hear me wrong. I am asking you about the small yellowish-orange fruit with a single pit. Some love apricots; others hate apricots. What is your answer? Do you like apricots? I ask you that question because I read this story recently.

A young psychology student serving in the Army decided to test a theory. Drawing kitchen duty, he was given the job of passing out apricots at the end of

the chow line. He asked the first few soldiers that came by, "You don't want any apricots, do you?" Ninety percent said "No." Then he tried the positive approach: "You do want apricots, don't you?" About half answered, "Uh, yeah. I'll take some." Then he tried a third test, based on the fundamental either/or selling technique. This time he asked, "One dish of apricots or two?" And in spite of the fact that soldiers don't like Army apricots, 40 percent took two dishes and 50 percent took one!

That young psychology student must have learned quickly the power of expectations. In America, we celebrate the fact that we are free. You are the captain of your own ship and no one can tell you what to do. You do what you want to do and you say what you want to say. Within each one of us is a rebel, who is charting our own course. No one can tell us what to do or not do. However, this is the truth. We are not as free as we think. Daily we are influenced by the expectations of others. That is what we find out in the scripture lesson for today. Let us look at those sacred words together.

According to the scriptures Abram was selected by God to be the father of a great nation. (Genesis 12:2) Do you remember? We talked about him in past summers. His descendents were to be a numerous as the stars of the sky. God even changes his name from Abram (the father of many) to Abraham (the father of the multitude). Yet, Abraham only had one child with his wife Sarah, Isaac. They were advanced in age when this child was born. Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah was ninety. Isaac must have learned from his example. He became a father at the younger age, sixty. (Genesis 25:26)

It must have been a big day in Isaac's home when he and his wife Rebekah welcomed twin boys into the world. It is important you get the next line. The boys were not identical twins; the boys were fraternal. The boys were nothing alike. There was even conflict in the womb. (Genesis 25:22) We will look at the source of the conflict next week. The first baby must have been a handsome lad. He was red and hairy. For that reason they named him Esau. Esau means "hairy." (Genesis 25:25) The second baby had a fighting spirit. He was still wrestling with his brother. They scriptures say he was grabbing his brother's heel. They named him Jacob. (Genesis 25:26) That means "seizing the heel." The differences between the two did not vanish as they grew. They became more pronounced. Esau, the hairy one, became a great outdoors man. Jacob, the heel grabber, stayed near the tents.

Before Esau and Jacob took their first breathe in this world, the die was cast for their lives in many ways. There were already certain expectations placed on them. Just think about it for a moment. They were surrounded the expectations of others. Societal expectations were influencing them from the very moment they entered this world. Family expectations were influencing them from the

moment they entered into this world. Divine expectations were influencing them from the moment they entered this world. Those same expectations are influencing you and me. It is for this reason this ancient text speaks to us.

Today, I want to look at those three expectations. What does our society expect from you? What does your family expect from you? What does God expect from you? So if you are ready to begin say, "**Amen!**"

### **Societal Expectations**

What does our society expect from us? Perhaps, you saw this piece on the news. May 24, 2012 the St. Louis Cardinals were hosting the Philadelphia Phillies. The game was competitive and the crowd was enjoying themselves. In the crowd was twenty-two year old Collin Grundstrom was having a super time. Just as the seventh inning was about to begin, a beer fueled Grundstrom decided to take his fun to a new level. He decided to slip into his birthday suit and streak onto the field. At first no one could believe their eyes. It hit everyone at the same time. The police was not amused. They ran after him. In time, they caught him and body slammed him. He was charged with public nudity. One of the things society expects is for you to keep your clothes on.

Every society is filled with countless expectations of their citizens. Sociologists call them societal norms. Consider these societal expects. They are in no particular order.

1. Giving Christmas presents
2. Leaving a tip for a waiter (At least 15%)
3. Saying please and thank-you
4. Avoid burping in public
5. Chewing gum with no sound
6. Chewing food with your mouth closed.
7. Showering
8. Brushing your teeth.
9. Opening the door for a lady
10. Surrendering your seat to an elderly person.

Do I have to go on? You get the point. There are certain things our society expects. It is true of our generation and it was true of Jacob's generation as well. From the moment Jacob entered into this world his culture was telling him how to act. From the moment you entered this world our culture was tell us the proper way to act. Is anyone here ready to slip into your birthday suit and go for a run? Of coarse not because our society doesn't tolerate such behavior. If you understand this point then say, "**Amen!**" We are influenced by societal expectations. We are all influenced by family expectations.

## **Family Expectations**

May the fifth of this year was one of the red letter days in my life. My youngest daughter, Anna graduated from college. She didn't just graduate from any college. She graduated from the college I graduated from, Mount Union. As a matter of fact her Major is the same as my major, Business Administration with a minor in Marketing. In several classes we had the same professors thirty-four years apart. I am so pleased with her graduation that I decided to get my class ring resized and start wearing it again. (No, it is not smaller.) My father never told me two things. He never said to me, "I loved you." He never said to me, "I am proud of you." Now, it is too late. I didn't want to make that same mistake so I have told Anna countless times. Did you know only 11% of Americans have earned a college degree? Anna said to me, "Dad, I don't know why you are so impressed. I thought we were expected to go to college?"

What does your family expect from you? In the next two weeks we are going to baptize two babies. In infant baptism we recognize the influence others have on the child. The parents, families and church are promising in infant baptism to do all in their power to raise the child in a Christian way so the child in time will be a Christian. Is there anyone here whose parents weren't Christian? Studies tell us you have the same political party as your parents. There was a time when you were the same vocation as your parents. When I ask couples getting married, "Whose relationship to you admire the most?" They never say Brad and Angie. They tell me their parents. Do I have to go on? Like it or not, you are influenced by your family.

Jacob was influenced by his family. What did the text say? His father was praying for him before he was born. Is anyone here surprise Jacob went on to be one of the great spiritual leaders in the history of the world? How are you influencing the spiritual life of the youngest in your family? If that makes you think say, "**Amen!**" We influenced by both societal and family expectations.

## **Divine Expectations**

What does God expect from you? Someone asked Jesus the question, "What is the greatest commandment in the law?" (Matthew 22:36) Jesus answers the question, "You are to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:37) That means you are to love God completely. In other words, God is to be the top priority in your life. That is what God expects.

According to Forbes magazine, America is the eleventh happiest country in the world. They looked at 184 different countries and examined a wide variety of facts. According to Forbes, Norway is the happiest country in the world, followed Denmark, Australia and New Zealand. The unhappiest country in the world is the Central African Republic. I think that fact is interesting. We're number 11!

Obviously, money can't buy happiness. That would make us number one. Our country holds 60% of the world's wealth and we live at a standard of living far higher than any other country. If you don't believe me then you should live in another country. You will have a hard time. We are living the dream. So the question is: why are we number eleven? Many have been trying to figure out our low ranking. The negative people are saying it is the state of the economy, soaring national debt or declining world influence. Those factors are not helping our national state of mind but I don't think they are the real reason.

I am a theologian so I am going to give you a theological answer. I think we are number eleven because God is no longer a priority in our society. We are no longer preoccupied with our divine purpose. Today, we are preoccupied with our incomes. As a nation we are spiritually out of balance. I hear it from ever generation. When I talk to college students, I ask them the question, "Do you like what you are studying?" Sometimes they say, "Yes!" Sometimes they say, "No! However, I am going to make good money when I am done." I don't want to sound critical. I understand their situation. Life is expensive. Think of everything young people are going to have to buy in their lifetimes! No wonder they are preoccupied with income. However, money can't be the only factor. Where does God factor into their decision process? Here is something you need to ponder later. Your job and your divine purpose may not be the same. Your job is only there to pay for your purpose. Have you ever wondered what God wants you to do with your life?

How great of a priority is God in your life? God has created each one of us for a specific reason. Jacob was created for a specific reason. He was the father of twelve boys, who would be the foundations of the twelve tribes of Israel. That was his divine purpose. His job was secondary. What is more important to you? God or income? What does God expect from you? Perhaps, this is a better question. How much has God influenced your life? If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

So before we go to the communion table let me ask you the question again. Do you like apricots? It is not really about how much you like a small yellowish-orange fruit with a single pit. I am really asking how much others influence you. Expectations are influential. The society in which you live influences our lives. (Everyone keep your clothes on!) The families in which you were born influence your life. God should be influencing your life. How much is God influencing your life? American engineer Charles F. Kettering once said, *"High achievements always take place in the framework of high expectations."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**