

*God Blesses the Undeserving: Genesis 26-28*  
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We just celebrated Thanksgiving this week, and one of the things I'm so thankful for is God's Word. It's something that we often take for granted, but it is an amazing privilege and blessing to have God's inspired Word right here in our hands. God has spoken to His people, and His truth has been recorded for us in this Book. The Bible is God's mighty, powerful Word, which tells us of God's mighty, powerful deeds throughout history. And right now we're studying the beginning of this amazing story, in the very first book of the Bible—Genesis.

As a preacher I'm so thankful for the Bible because my task is to teach and encourage and exhort and apply the truths that come from this Book. My task is not to entertain or to impress or to set before you some agenda that I've come up with on my own. What I do each week is open up my Bible to the next section that we come to—and this is what I love about preaching through books of the Bible rather than skipping around—I go to the next section and ask, "Lord, what do You want to teach us this week? What do You want to show us about Yourself? What do You want us to see about ourselves? How are You going to teach us? How are You going to change us?" And then I study and try to understand what's happening in the passage, and then I think and pray about how it applies to my life and all of our lives.

Be thankful for the Bible. And be thankful that we're part of a church where the Bible is esteemed and is at the very center of who we are and what we do. Because if we're not here to study and apply and be changed by God's Word, then why are we here? We are here to experience the power of God as He works through His Word. He will sanctify believers through His Word, and He will call unbelievers to Himself through His Word. And that's why the Bible ought to hold a central place in our personal lives, and it should be the focal point of our times together in corporate worship.

So with thankful hearts for God's Word, let's turn our attention now to Genesis 26-28 and see what God has to show us this week. I want to focus on three main truths that this passage teaches us.

### **God Blesses the Undeserving**

The first truth is that God Blesses the Undeserving. That was a theme throughout Abraham's life, because he certainly didn't deserve God's blessing on his life. He sinned and lied and often lacked faith. He didn't deserve God's blessing, but God was pleased to shower His grace on Abraham. In the beginning of chapter 26 God pronounces His blessing on Abraham's son, Isaac. Abraham and Sarah have both passed away. Isaac is married to Rebekah, and they have their twin boys, Esau and Jacob. And God makes this amazing promise to the undeserving Isaac, essentially the same promise that He had made to Abraham: (26:3-5) "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."

God's promises came to Abraham by grace. It was by God's grace that Abraham believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6). And it was by God's grace that Abraham's faith was a real faith that produced obedience, even the astounding obedience Abraham demonstrated on Mount Moriah where he was willing to offer up his son Isaac. And now Isaac receives the blessing. The promise originally given to Abraham is now given to his son. They are both sinners. Both undeserving of God's blessing. But God blesses the undeserving.

In the next section of chapter 26 we're reminded of how undeserving both Abraham and Isaac were, because we see Isaac follow in his father's sinful footsteps. He lies to the men in

Gerar and says of his wife Rebekah, “She is my sister.” This is the same thing that Abraham did in Egypt and in Gerar. They were not trusting God’s promises, and instead tried to assure their own safety by lying. Isaac didn’t want anyone to kill him in order to marry Rebekah, so he just said that she was his sister.

It’s so fascinating to see the dynamic of God’s grace in the lives of these patriarchs. I’m so glad that the Bible tells us both the good and the bad details of their lives. Because we’re able to see that these guys were just like we are. They were sinners who did stupid and sinful and deceptive things, and were therefore completely undeserving of God’s blessing. And at the same time God granted them faith, and He was slowly changing them and bringing about the obedience of faith in their lives. They were sinners saved by God’s grace. And they were sinners being changed by God’s grace.

In chapter 27 we see another very striking example of God blessing someone who does not deserve it. Last week we read the passage at the end of chapter 25 in which Jacob manipulates the circumstances in order to get his brother’s birthright. And now in chapter 27 Jacob’s shrewdness turns into outright deception as he pretends to be Esau in order to receive his father’s blessing.

Look at chapter 27:1-29.

Jacob was a man who most certainly did not deserve to be blessed. He deserved punishment. He deserved condemnation. And yet God blesses the undeserving.

We look at these things that Jacob did, and we’re appalled by his sin. But in order for us to see the wonder of the Gospel, we need to understand that we are in the same place Jacob was in. We are just as undeserving of God’s blessing as Jacob was. Maybe we haven’t dressed up as someone else and deceived an old blind relative. But we certainly have sinned in our thoughts and our actions and our attitudes, and because of those sins we deserve God’s wrath. We don’t deserve God’s blessing. We deserve His punishment. Because we have harbored bitterness in our hearts. We have entertained lustful thoughts. We have been selfish and prideful and envious and slothful and gluttonous. For all these sins and more, we are in the same position Jacob was in. We do not deserve any good thing from God.

But God blesses the undeserving! What a merciful and gracious God we serve. He would be just to condemn us to hell for eternity, and that will be the sad fate of many who never receive the forgiveness that comes through Jesus Christ. But for those who do repent of their sins and turn to Jesus Christ in faith, their sins are forgiven. And instead of the punishment we deserve, we are blessed by God in a way that we don’t deserve. This is the Gospel. This is what Christianity is all about. You deserve God’s wrath because of your sin. But if you turn to Jesus Christ and believe that He is your only hope of forgiveness and freedom and joy and hope, then God will bless you. He will change you from the inside out and give you a whole new perspective on life. And He will assure you of your great inheritance in heaven, that when you die you will enjoy His presence forever and ever. Trust Jesus, and receive God’s blessing that you don’t deserve.

### **God is Bigger than Sin and Deception**

The next truth that we see in this story is the fact that God is bigger than sin and deception. Rebekah and Jacob conspired to deceive Isaac. They lied and tricked Isaac so that he blessed Jacob, the younger son, instead of Esau, the older son.

We need to realize how dysfunctional this family was. We shouldn’t think that we can look at all the men and women in the Bible and find wonderful examples of godliness. That’s not true. We shouldn’t read this narrative as condoning Jacob’s behavior, or Rebekah’s behavior, in the least. The Bible just tells it like it is. That’s one of the things I love about the Bible. These patriarchs are not presented as super holy spiritual heroes. They’re sinners, and at points they do some of the most despicable and deceptive things.

Tom Schreiner preached a sermon on this passage, and he commented that you wouldn't find this family featured in a Focus on the Family publication. That's true. Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob and Esau are not here as examples for us to follow. They are a very dysfunctional family. Lying to each other, suspicious of each other, hating each other. This is the kind of family you would see on Jerry Springer, not Focus on the Family.

Notice some of the problems. First of all, each of the parents had a favorite child. In chapter 25:27-28 it says, "When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob." Isaac loved the first-born Esau because he was a hunter, and he loved the game that Esau would bring back for him to eat. But Rebekah loved Jacob, the younger twin. Jacob was a mommas-boy and a home-body. He stayed around the tents and probably did a lot of the domestic chores with Rebekah. So Isaac had his favorite, and Rebekah had her favorite. That was one problem in the household.

Another problem was that Isaac did not want to submit to God's will for his sons. God made it clear before these boys were even born that the older would serve the younger. But Isaac had his heart set on blessing Esau, the firstborn. So he called Esau and told him to hunt game and prepare delicious food and then he would bless him. That's another problem in the family, that the father was rebelling against God's will.

A third major problem, then, is that Rebekah took matters into her own hands to thwart Isaac's plans. It's kind of like Sarah wanting Abraham to sleep with Hagar in order to produce an heir. She thought that she could bring about God's promises by her own efforts. Similarly Rebekah decides that she's going to make sure that her Jacob gets the blessing, even if it means lying and cheating and stealing to do it. Rebekah should have trusted in God's promise, and she should have acted truthfully and uprightly rather than stooping to this level of deception in order to control the situation.

All that is to say: this was a dysfunctional family, and we learn from them as negative examples, not positive examples. We don't read this story and say, "This must be what the Bible says a family should be like." No, this is the opposite of what a family should be like.

But the amazing thing we see about God in this passage is that He is so much bigger than this sin and deception. It's remarkable to read such a suspenseful narrative, filled with secrets and eavesdropping and lying and suspicion and deception, and then to realize that the whole thing happened just as God planned it. In the end, God's promise was fulfilled. Jacob, the younger brother, received the blessing rather than Esau.

The sin and deception that we see in this passage is detestable. It is wrong. It deserves God's wrath. Those involved are responsible for their sinful actions. And we also need to realize that these things did not surprise God. They made Him mad and grieved His heart, but the events unfolded just as He had planned. He planned for Jacob to receive the blessing, and for the older to serve the younger.

Look at Isaac's reaction when he realized what had happened. Isaac blessed Jacob, thinking he was blessing Esau. Then Jacob left, and Jacob must have felt a relief and excitement that he actually pulled it off. And just as Jacob left, Esau returned from his hunting and prepared a meal and brought it to his father. Verse 32 says, "Isaac said to [Esau], 'Who are you?' He answered, 'I am your son, your firstborn, Esau.' Then Isaac trembled very violently and said, 'Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed.'"

Isaac trembled, I think, because he saw that he could not thwart God's plans. Isaac wanted to bless Esau, contrary to God's plan. But instead he unknowingly blessed Jacob. This is how sovereign our God is. Even those who oppose Him are part of His plan. There is no possible way to diminish or hinder what God has purposed to do.

Think of Judas. Think of the Jewish leaders. Think of Pilate and Herod. There was deception, evil of all kinds, betrayal, cowardice. These prideful and wicked people put to death

the sinless Son of God. And what did Jesus say to Judas at the Last Supper? He said, “For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!” Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man, and Judas is the one who is about to betray Him. And Jesus makes this mind-blowing statement that God planned for Judas to betray Jesus AND Judas is guilty for betraying Jesus.

We find the same truth communicated in Peter’s Pentecost sermon in Acts 2, where he says to the men of Israel, “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23). Or in Acts 4 where they prayed, “truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:27-28).

In the death of Jesus, more dramatically than anywhere else, we see that God is bigger than sin and deception. Sin and deception put the perfect Lamb of God on the cross, and it was all exactly according to God’s plan—God’s good and gracious plan to sacrifice His beloved Son for sinners like us.

Stand in awe of this God who is so big and so powerful, whose plans cannot be hindered by anyone or anything. And when you see sin and deception around you and in you, remind yourself that God is bigger than that. He is the One who “works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Ephesians 1:11). He will keep His promises, and He will work all things for good for those who belong to Him.

### **GOD IS WITH US**

God blesses the undeserving, and He is bigger than sin and deception. And the third point that I want us to see this morning is that God is with us. This is from chapter 28.

As you can imagine, Esau was furious at what had happened and how his brother had stolen the blessing. He was so mad that he planned to kill his brother. But Rebekah heard of Esau’s plans, and she arranged for Jacob to flee to Haran and live with Laban, her brother.

And on his way to Haran, we read of this interesting dream that Jacob had one night. Look at chapter 28:10-22.

In this passage the promise that was first pronounced to Abraham, and then to Isaac, is now given to Jacob. Jacob did not deserve this blessing, but God graciously chose to bless him. God blesses the undeserving. And even though Jacob deserved to be cast out of the presence of God, God instead promised to bless Jacob with His presence. God promised to be with him.

This ladder that Jacob saw in his dream is such a vivid demonstration of God’s presence with him. The ladder stretched from earth all the way up to heaven, and angels were going up and down the ladder. And in verse 15 God said, “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go.”

The image of this ladder stretching from earth to heaven, and God’s words to Jacob here, ought to be a great encouragement to all of us. Because God is with us. There is a ladder, there is a bridge, stretching between earth and heaven, between us and God. And even though we deserve to be cast out of God’s presence because of our sin, there is a way to enter His presence. There is a ladder that God provides, and that ladder is Jesus Christ.

In John 1 Jesus says that He is this ladder. It’s in the passage where Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael. He first calls Philip, and then Philip tells Nathanael about this Jesus of Nazareth. And Nathanael questioned whether anything good could come out of Nazareth. But then Jesus amazed him with His knowledge, and Nathanael responded, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” And then Jesus answered, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (John 1:49-51). This is clearly a reference to Jacob’s dream in Genesis 28, where the angels were

ascending and descending on the ladder. But here Jesus says that the angels will ascend and descend on the Son of Man—Jesus, Himself! Jesus is the ladder. He is the bridge.

We are all in the place of Jacob. We have sinned, and we deserve God's punishment. We are cut off from God's presence. But God has been gracious to make a way to bridge that chasm that our sin has created. And that bridge is the God-Man, Jesus Christ. He is our only hope of entering the presence of God. He is the way and the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). He is Immanuel, God with us. Trust in Him. Cling to Him. Take comfort in the fact that He said, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). And look forward to that day in the new heaven and new earth when the dwelling place of God will be with man, and "He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Revelation 21:3). Undeserving sinners can eternally enjoy the presence of God because Jesus Christ bridged that infinite chasm between sinful humanity and a holy God. Jesus Christ bridged that gap so that we can have fellowship with God Almighty.