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Genesis 27:1-46

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English Standard Version

“Deception and Division”

This is the 42nd sermon in the series on the Book of Genesis entitled,
The God Who Is There!

Genesis 27:1-46

“When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son and said to him, “My son”; and he answered, “Here I am.”² He said, “Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death.³ Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me,⁴ and prepare for me delicious food, such as I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.”

⁵ Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it,⁶ Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “I heard your father speak to your brother Esau,⁷ ‘Bring me game and prepare for me delicious food, that I may eat it and bless you before the Lord before I die.’⁸ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice as I command you.⁹ Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, so that I may prepare from them delicious food for your father, such as he loves.¹⁰ And you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.”¹¹ But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, “Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man.¹² Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing.”¹³ His mother said to him, “Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, bring them to me.”

¹⁴ So he went and took them and brought them to his mother, and his mother prepared delicious food, such as his father loved.¹⁵ Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her older son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son.¹⁶ And the

skins of the young goats she put on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. ¹⁷ And she put the delicious food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

¹⁸ So he went in to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" ¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me." ²⁰ But Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" He answered, "Because the Lord your God granted me success." ²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not." ²² So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." ²³ And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands. So he blessed him. ²⁴ He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "I am." ²⁵ Then he said, "Bring it near to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you." So he brought it near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank.

²⁶ Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son." ²⁷ So he came near and kissed him. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said,

"See, the smell of my son

is as the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed!

²⁸ May God give you of the dew of heaven

and of the fatness of the earth

and plenty of grain and wine.

²⁹ Let peoples serve you,

and nations bow down to you.

Be lord over your brothers,

and may your mother's sons bow down to you.

Cursed be everyone who curses you,

and blessed be everyone who blesses you!"

³⁰ As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting. ³¹ He also prepared delicious food and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father arise and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me." ³² His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau." ³³ 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 have blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed." ³⁴ As soon as Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" ³⁵ But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing." ³⁶ Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has cheated me these two times. He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." Then he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" ³⁷ Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Behold, I have made him lord over you, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?" ³⁸ Esau said to his father, "Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

³⁹ Then Isaac his father answered and said to him:

"Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be,

and away from the dew of heaven on high.

⁴⁰ *By your sword you shall live,
and you shall serve your brother;
but when you grow restless
you shall break his yoke from your neck.”*

⁴¹ *Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.”* ⁴² *But the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son and said to him, “Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you by planning to kill you.”* ⁴³ *Now therefore, my son, obey my voice. Arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran* ⁴⁴ *and stay with him a while, until your brother’s fury turns away—* ⁴⁵ *until your brother’s anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?”*

⁴⁶ *Then Rebekah said to Isaac, “I loathe my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?”*

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the Scriptures and making us Your people. Thank You for this church family. Lord, as we come to your Word, we pray that You would give us ears to hear and minds to understand as we study these things which You have authored. Apply them to us, proving in us that Your Word is profitable for reproof and correction and training and righteousness. Change us and shape us by your truth so that we know You better, and love You more deeply, and pursue You more diligently. And for this we need Your grace and we need Your Spirit. Give us the desire to learn from You this morning, in the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: *Ordinary People*¹

When I graduated from college, all the way back in 1980, the big movie that year was called ***Ordinary People***. It was hugely popular at the time; it won four Oscars, including Best Picture. And it marked the directorial debut of Robert Redford, for which he also won an Oscar. It starred Donald Sutherland, Mary Tyler Moore, Judd Hirsch, and Timothy Hutton. The movie was based upon the 1976 novel of the same name by Judith Guest. The story concerns the **disintegration** of an upper-middle class family in Lake Forest, Illinois, following the death of the older son, Buck (whom everyone idolized), in a boating accident.

Ordinary People was about a **“typical”** family living in the suburbs of Chicago. The film begins after the older of two sons has been killed in a drowning accident, which was caused by his own foolishness. The younger son, Conrad (played by Timothy Hutton), is racked by guilt, so that as the story unfolds, he increasingly finds that he’s unable to cope with life, and so he attempts suicide. After a four month hospitalization, Conrad is back in his upper-middle class suburban Chicago home with his parents, Calvin and Beth Jarrett. Conrad now deals with post-traumatic stress disorder and survivor's guilt. He is in therapy. The story is told from **his point of view**.

1 The Introduction is adapted from *Genesis: An Expository Commentary, Vol. 2*, by Dr. James Montgomery Boice, page 751ff. Information about the movie “*Ordinary People*” was taken from IMDb.com and Wikipedia.com

The mother, Beth (played by Mary Tyler Moore), is domineering and had always preferred his brother, and because of the suicide attempt, has now grown cold toward Conrad. In fact, in some depth, the movie reveals the **profound perverse narcissism** of the mother, who seeks success only in the social norms of **appearances and approval**. She is determined to maintain the appearance of perfection and normalcy. She is plastic through and through and it gets to the point of being really annoying and yet Mary Tyler Moore's portrayal of Beth is perfect. Of all the characters, **hers** is really the most disturbed. She wants to have things exactly as they were before — even though she mourns the loss of her firstborn son. She **can't** love Conrad because he committed **the one unforgivable sin** — **he survived** while her favorite son **didn't**. Beth is blind to the feelings of her family, and has unwittingly installed **coldness** of heart, **superficiality** of feelings, and **absence** of empathy, as the standard way of life in her home. She refuses to question herself and she refuses to respond to her family's need for love.

The father is weak. Calvin (played by Donald Sutherland) is trapped between the **domineering** mom and the **guilt-ridden** son and is just trying to hold the family together. Mother and son generally argue while Calvin awkwardly tries to referee, generally taking Conrad's side for fear of pushing him over the edge again. He struggles to connect with his surviving son and to understand his wife.

Things come to a climax near Christmas, when Calvin confronts Beth calling her out on her attitude. In a moment of utter rage Beth shouts at Calvin, “Why can't you see my side?” and “What kind of mother doesn't love her son?”

Calvin, however, emotionally confronts Beth one last time. He questions her love and asks whether she is capable of **truly loving anyone**. Stunned, Beth decides to flee her family rather than deal with her own emotions, or that of her family. Calvin and Conrad are left to come to terms with their new family situation. **It's just a typical, ordinary family!**

A powerful drama ... and really depressing.

I think of that film when I think of the household of Isaac. We've already seen enough to make us wonder how **this family** could be a family in which God was at work and through which the blessing of the Messiah would come to all people. **Isaac is weak**. But not only that. Unlike the father in Ordinary People, he's **knowingly opposed** to God's express leading in the matter of his sons' future. **Rebekah is domineering**. She's also strong-willed and scheming, even to the point of perpetrating an elaborate hoax on her nearly blind and apparently dying husband. Esau is sensuous and secular. Jacob is a cheat. We've already seen all this. But now, in the **sequel** to the episode of the stolen birthright, the plot **sickens**.

Just another typical, ordinary family! All of their dysfunction comes out into the open. The chapter moves by focusing in on one character at time. Moses, the author, starts with the father, and so we begin by seeing how ...

v. 1-4: **ISAAC PLOTS**²

“When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son and said to him, “My son”; and he answered, “Here I am.”² He said, “Behold, I am old; I

2 The Exposition of the text has adapted material from the Books, *Preaching the Word - Genesis: Beginning and Blessing* by Dr. R. Kent Hughes, pages 347-355; *Living in the Grip of Relentless Grace: The Gospel in the Lives of Isaac & Jacob* by Dr. Iain Duguid, pages 31-45. **And the Sermon, “The Blessing for Esau,” by Dr. J. Ligon Duncan, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, 7/17/99, www.fpcjackson.org.**

do not know the day of my death. ³ *Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me,* ⁴ *and prepare for me delicious food, such as I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.*”

Aging had left Isaac visually impaired and dependent upon his family — and demanding. But most notably Isaac, notwithstanding his authentic faith, had come to **oppose the revealed will of God** regarding Jacob and Esau. He was well aware of the battle that had taken place between the twins in Rebekah’s womb. He knew that God had said, **Genesis 25:23**, “*And the Lord said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.”*”

Rebekah wouldn’t let him forget it. And the fact that Jacob had manipulated Esau to sell his birthright to him had to be a longstanding source of irritation to Isaac, and a subject of contention with his strong-willed wife. He was also painfully aware that Esau had married two Canaanite women — and Genesis 26 tells us that they had made life bitter for both him and Rebekah. But against the weight of all of this, Isaac was determined that though Esau had lost his birthright, he would now give him the firstborn’s blessing.

In his old age Isaac had given himself over to stubbornness and self-gratification. And he determined to have his way despite God’s word. Isaac’s desire that his “**soul**” would bless Esau indicates how intensely passionate he was about it. This is more than saying, “I desire with all my heart.” It was with his whole being. As one commentator explains, “Isaac summons from the very depths of his own soul all the vitality and energy at his command in order to invoke God’s blessing upon his son.”

Isaac was willing to **ignore God’s word** and the desires of his wife and his elect son (who now had the birthright) in order to bless his immoral, freeloading, redneck son. Essentially, Isaac tossed a relational torch into the tents of his family. And because of his sin **no one would do well** — not himself, nor Rebekah, nor Isaac, nor Esau. There are no heroes in this story — only sinners. And old Isaac was the chief. But that doesn’t let any of the others off the hook. After seeing how Isaac plots, we move on to watch how ...

v. 5-17: REBEKAH SCHEMES

“Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, ⁶ *Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “I heard your father speak to your brother Esau,* ⁷ *‘Bring me game and prepare for me delicious food, that I may eat it and bless you before the Lord before I die.’* ⁸ *Now therefore, my son, obey my voice as I command you.* ⁹ *Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, so that I may prepare from them delicious food for your father, such as he loves.* ¹⁰ *And you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.”* ¹¹ *But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, “Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man.* ¹² *Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing.”* ¹³ *His mother said to him, “Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, bring them to me.”*

¹⁴ *So he went and took them and brought them to his mother, and his mother prepared delicious food, such as his father loved.* ¹⁵ *Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her older son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son.* ¹⁶ *And the skins of the young goats she put on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck.* ¹⁷ *And she put the delicious food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.”*

Of course, Rebekah heard the whole plot. Tent walls hide nothing, especially when there’s domestic strife. As soon as Esau departed, scheming Rebekah went into high gear. She

rehearsed the plot to her devoted Jacob and sent him on his way to secure a couple of goats for a feast to be served **by Jacob** instead of Esau. Jacob's hesitation about her plan was not moral reservations, since he had no problem with being deceitful. Rather he feared **the consequences** if he couldn't pull it off. He might receive a curse instead of a blessing. But Rebekah was supremely confident, and oh so very self-assured, verse 13, *"Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, bring them to me."*

Rebekah knew the recipe well. She missed nothing. She knew that the way to Isaac's heart was through his stomach. Deftly she slaughtered the goats, dressed them out, and brought the meal to perfection. But her greatest scheme was in disguising Jacob. She placed the best in Esau's wardrobe on Jacob, so as to imitate his profile and permeate Jacob with his smell. Esau was incredibly hairy — think of him as a redneck wookiee — so hairy that goatskins had to be bound on the exposed parts of Jacob's body to imitate his feel. How **absurd** Jacob must have looked as his mother placed the steaming meal in his hands. **Surely** Jacob hoped no one would see him. And just as surely, Rebekah hovered in the background gesturing to her **ridiculously** outfitted favorite son.

But there is a deeper absurdity here — the mother and son's belief **that God wouldn't be able to accomplish His purposes ... without their help**. Mother **and** son believed that what they were doing was **helping** God's revealed will along, and therefore their deceitful ways **were justified**. They believed that **unrighteous** acts were appropriate and good if they aided the **righteous** work of God. They believed that the ends justified the means. **And biblically, that's not true!**

In today's world many people similarly believe that **personal ethics** are irrelevant if what you're doing helps bring about the will of God. The variations of this ethical absurdity are endless — "It's God's will that I provide adequately for my family. Therefore telling a financial lie to a client is OK." Rebekah would have signed off on that. God couldn't be trusted to accomplish His purposes by Himself — obviously God needed her help. And that's gonna backfire.

And sadly, it seems that her son has learned her lessons well, because if Rebekah schemes, then ...

v. 18-29: JACOB DECEIVES

"So he went in to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?"¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me."²⁰ But Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" He answered, "Because the Lord your God granted me success."²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not."²² So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau."²³ And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands. So he blessed him.²⁴ He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "I am."²⁵ Then he said, "Bring it near to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you." So he brought it near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank.

²⁶ Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son."²⁷ So he came near and kissed him. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said,

"See, the smell of my son

is as the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed!

*²⁸ May God give you of the dew of heaven
and of the fatness of the earth
and plenty of grain and wine.*

*²⁹ Let peoples serve you,
and nations bow down to you.*

*Be lord over your brothers,
and may your mother's sons bow down to you.*

*Cursed be everyone who curses you,
and blessed be everyone who blesses you!"*

Jacob was a product of his mother's love and his own self-promoting heart. The "better angels" of Jacob's nature (to use Abraham Lincoln's words) were silenced. Here, Jacob was despicable. Jacob set his hesitations aside, and shouldering his ridiculous disguise, he played his part to the best of his abilities.

Of course, his Esau imitations didn't completely work since tenors have difficulty singing bass! Thus we read, verse 22, "***The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.***" Not only that, but Jacob lies three times. First, when he said to his father, verse 19, "***I am Esau your firstborn.***" Did these lying words choke him? Did he hesitate? We wonder. Then second, Jacob lied when he named the Lord as the reason for his good hunting, verse 20, "***Because the Lord your God granted me success***" — which was a bald-faced blasphemy. He made God his accomplice.

The claustrophobic **intimacy** of the deception is fascinating. Covered with animal skins, Jacob came face-to-face with the unseeing eyes of his father as his father felt his goat-clad hands and neck. Isaac was satisfied enough to go ahead with the blessing. But in the last moment he was again gripped by a "vague discontent" and renewed his questioning, verse 24, "***He said, 'Are you really my son Esau?' He answered, 'I am.' Then he said, 'Bring it near to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you.' So he brought it near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank.***" Food first, blessing second! Now, with Jacob's third lie complete, the old man commenced eating, smacking his lips, guzzling the vintage wine, and drizzling over his long, white beard.

The meal over, Jacob was again drawn into stifling, terrifying intimacy with his father. Look at verse 26, "***Then his father Isaac said to him, 'Come near and kiss me, my son.' So he came near and kissed him. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him.***" Satisfied, Isaac laid his hands on pseudo-Esau and delivered a fiercely passionate blessing from the depths of his soul. The blessing is in the form of four poetic stanzas.

First stanza:

***See, the smell of my son
is as the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed!***

The stolen garments, smelling of the country, called forth from Isaac the promise of the land, which produces abundantly.

Second stanza:

***May God give you the dew of heaven
and of the fatness of the earth
and plenty of grain and wine.***

Dew is a favorite Hebrew metaphor for God's goodness in providing abundance. Dew has always provided the main source of water during the rainless summer months when the

heavy humid air of the Mediterranean is condensed by the cool night temperatures to a life-giving mist. “Dew,” “fatness,” and “plenty” formed an invocation of refreshment and prosperity upon his son.

Third stanza:

*Let peoples serve you,
and nations bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers,
and may your mother's sons bow down to you.*

The Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner writes that “Isaac’s fierce pride in Esau demanded an empire for him.” He utterly rejected God’s word to Rebekah that *“the older shall serve the younger.”* Isaac blessed pseudo-Esau with universal dominion.

Fourth stanza:

*Cursed be everyone who curses you,
and blessed be everyone who blesses you!*

This final blessing reiterated God’s words to Abraham invoking dynamic protection. So we see that Isaac’s passionate pride erupted to bless his Esau (who was really Jacob disguised) with the covenant mantle of fertile land and God’s good bounty, empire, and protection, and his word stood. **He had thwarted God ... or so he thought.** But Jacob, in Esau’s clothing, slouched away in breathless excitement. He had **deceived** and **displaced** Esau — **again**.

But then Esau returns, only to discover that he’s been out-manuevered again. And so now we see ...

v. 30-40: ESAU’S DEFEAT

*“As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting. ³¹ He also prepared delicious food and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, “Let my father arise and eat of his son’s game, that you may bless me.” ³² His father Isaac said to him, “Who are you?” He answered, “I am your son, your firstborn, Esau.” ³³ **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 have blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed.”** ³⁴ As soon as Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry and said to his father, “Bless me, even me also, O my father!” ³⁵ But he said, “Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing.” ³⁶ Esau said, “Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has cheated me these two times. He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.” Then he said, “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?” ³⁷ Isaac answered and said to Esau, “Behold, I have made him lord over you, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?” ³⁸ Esau said to his father, “Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father.” And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.*

³⁹ *Then Isaac his father answered and said to him:*

*“Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be,
and away from the dew of heaven on high.*

⁴⁰ *By your sword you shall live,
and you shall serve your brother;
but when you grow restless
you shall break his yoke from your neck.”*

Isaac could have had no idea of the earthquake that was coming. When he discovers the deception, the text says, verse 33, ***“Then Isaac trembled very violently.”*** The seismic shock that tore through Isaac’s body and soul signaled the fall of his willful opposition to the word of God. As the great Presbyterian preacher, Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse so remarkably observed, “Before a great work of grace, there must be a great earthquake. Isaac had put his personal love of Esau ahead of the will of God. Down came his idol, and the edifice of willful love collapsed before the shaking power that took hold of him. The arrogant pride which had slyly planned to thwart God toppled to the ground, broken beyond repair. When Isaac trembled exceedingly, all his desires were shattered.”

Isaac’s submissive conclusion, again, verse 33, ***“Yes, and he shall be blessed,”*** declared that he had been **defeated** and that he accepted Jacob as blessed of God. Nothing now, or ever, would change Isaac’s mind. Not even the tears of his beloved Esau.

Here it is instructive to note that **Hebrews 11:20** says, ***“By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.”*** How so? Was his willful, sinful blessing of Jacob (who he thought was Esau) an act of faith? No. Rather, Isaac’s ***“by faith”*** blessing of Jacob took place **immediately after** the shattering spiritual earthquake, when he affirmed of Jacob, ***“Yes, and he shall be blessed.”***

Esau regretted what had occurred but was helpless in its wake. He poured forth a bitter sarcasm that reinterpreted Jacob’s name as ***“cheater”*** as he mourned the loss both of his birthright and blessing. But despite this accurate characterization of his brother, the ultimate responsibility for losing his position remains Esau’s, as Hebrews makes clear, **Hebrews 12:15-17**, ***“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.”***

Esau continued to implore Isaac for a blessing. But all that was left for Esau was an anti-blessing, a blessing that substantiated that the original blessing had gone to Jacob. Esau’s destiny was not ***“dew”*** and ***“fatness”*** but to be ***“away”*** from such blessings. His descendants would live by the sword ... they would live with violence. And for a long time they would be subservient to Israel. This was Esau’s ***“blessing.”***

So what do we learn from these four all-stars? What this **typical, ordinary family** has to teach us is that ...

v. 41-46: SIN HAS CONSEQUENCES

“Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.”⁴² But the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son and said to him, “Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you by planning to kill you.⁴³ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice. Arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran⁴⁴ and stay with him a while, until your brother’s fury turns away—⁴⁵ until your brother’s anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?”

⁴⁶*Then Rebekah said to Isaac, “I loathe my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?”*

And now we see in verses 41 through 46 the consequences. It's heartbreaking. The consequences of this whole business will remain for many, many years. We learn that there is **never** freedom from sin. There are **always** consequences. It's so important for us to realize that when God forgives us, He doesn't sweep the consequences of our sin under the carpet.

This story was **real life**. Everyone in the story **sinned**. No one looked good — not Isaac, not Rebekah, not Jacob, not Esau. The patriarch Isaac **fought** against God's word. The matriarch Rebekah, through her favorite son, attempted to **manipulate** life so as to ensure that God's promise would actually happen. She and Jacob thought that **God needed help**, even if the help was **dishonest** and **self-serving**. Esau, the patriarch's favorite son, **disregarded** God's word. Indeed, he **despised** the promise.

Everyone in the family sought the blessings of God without bending the knee to God. This little family was fraught with ambition, jealousy, envy, lying, deceit, coveting, malice, manipulation, stubbornness, and stupidity.

And everyone lost. Rebekah was forced to send her pet son to far-off Mesopotamia, away from his father's house. Jacob was gone for **twenty years**, and it appears that his mother never saw him again. So Rebekah spent her final years without her sons and emotionally estranged from her husband. She sought her own way, didn't get what she wanted, and paid a high price.

Jacob's exile was just payment for his deceiving Esau as he experienced the extended miseries of conflict and exploitation at the hands of his Uncle Laban. Truly, blind old Isaac had tossed a torch into his families' tents by his fighting against God's word. And Esau, who despised his birthright, lost everything.

But in and above this is something of immense beauty and grandeur — the **invincible determination of God** to keep His word despite **the prevailing unbelief** of His people. God fulfilled his word **despite** Isaac's opposition, **despite** Rebekah schemes, **despite** Jacob's manipulation, **despite** Esau's indifference.

The invincible determination of God will see to it that His people are sanctified. Here the figurative earthquake in Isaac's life called him back to a life of faith. And Jacob was further pushed along the path that would result in his becoming Israel, a prince of God, as we'll see when we get to Genesis 32.

And for us, believers here and now, amidst our sins and our stupidities, **the invincible determination of God** is set to bring us to completion — even when we resist it. This truth was given memorable voice in Paul's advice to Timothy in the surprising fourth line of this remarkable trustworthy saying, **2 Timothy 2:11-13**, "*If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him;*

if we endure, we will also reign with Him;

if we deny Him, He also will deny us;

*if we are faithless, **He remains faithful** —*

for He cannot deny Himself.

The first two lines express assurance, "*If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him.*" Then the third line warns, "*if we deny Him, He also will deny us.*" So with the two lines of assurance and a line of warning ringing in our ears we come to the fourth line, "*if we are faithless ...*" We expect the corollary, "he will be unfaithful." But surprisingly we read, "**if we are faithless, He remains faithful.**" God **cannot** and **will not** be anything but **faithful** to His unfaithful children. God will be faithful to His word

and to His people — even when they manipulate and fight against His will. And more, His word will prevail.

CONCLUSION: *The Blame Game*³

If any of you have been following either sports or the news lately, then you know that one story has dominated both over the past week — the scandal of child abuse at Penn State. No matter how it turns out, it's a messy, sordid story of scheming and shame, deceit and division, and the consequences of sin.

Joe Paterno's career is over. It did not end well.

Writing in the midst of a cauldron of charges and investigations about child abuse, is not easy. Writing with certainty about **anything** in such times *is not wise*. I therefore make no pronouncements other than this: Paterno will **matter**.

By that, I mean to say that his legacy will matter. I don't just mean his legacy as a Brown-educated coach, Brooklyn-accented Easterner who preferred reading classics to hunting deer in a blue collar Central Pennsylvania place called “Happy Valley.” I don't mean his legacy as the man who not only impacted the football reputation of that college but, as Bill Pennington put it in the *New York Times*, “was Penn State.”

His legacy will include his concern for players, his development work in raising the academic influence of Penn State, and his character ... not character in the sense of the Columbo-like figure (with thick glasses) that roamed the sidelines like just another professor on campus who just happens to rule over big time football in America ... but the character of the man. That character which is so large and good that it shapes others' character. All of those things **matter**.

Now some may remember, years from now, this tragic incident. Maybe a lapse in judgment. Maybe some things we don't know. Surely some things we don't know. Will that be his legacy as well?

Legacies are about the impact that people leave on other people. We do not know if this alleged crime against a child— surely the greatest tragedy of all in this sad story — and the failure to report it that ended Paterno's career will loom so large that it overshadows the other facets of what was already a great legacy.

But we know this — at least those who know Jesus Christ know this — **sin stains even God's greatest creations**. That's what happened in the fall of Mankind. And if that were all of the truth we knew in our worldview lens, as we looked at this, and as we looked at life, then we would be of all men most pitiful.

But the gospel of Jesus Christ is that the legacy of shame was overcome at the cross, when God became Man to live the life we could not live and **2 Corinthians 5:21**, “*For our sake He [God] made Him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him [Christ] we might become the righteousness of God.*”

That **is** the gospel — the Good News. After King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and tried to cover it up, the prophet Nathan came to him and told him a story about a rich shepherd who stole a poor shepherd's only lamb. David was irate over the actions of the rich

3 The Conclusion has adapted material from the article “*Why Paterno Will Matter: A Theological Reflection on the Sad Case at Penn State*” by Dr. Michael Milton, 11/10/11, www.christiannewswire.com/news/2045018234.html and the blog post “*You Are The Man*” by Dr. Bob Flayhart, Oak Mountain Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, AL, 11/10/11, www.bobflayhart.com

shepherd and immediately called for swift and firm justice. And then Nathan revealed to David that he himself was that very man. We can all become so angry and self-righteous over another's sin and be guilty ourselves of the same sin yet fail to see it.

It's very important for you to realize that **every sin** that you and I will ever commit, Jesus wore stripes and died for. You need to understand that the full force of the penalty for **those sins** is visited upon your Savior. And that's why as a believing Christian we can never be flippant about sin because **we know** what that sin costs our Savior. But there's another way in which we're never able to escape the consequences of sin. And that is if God loves you, He's not going to let you get away with sin without **disciplining** you, because He doesn't want to see you **destroyed** by sin. And sin will destroy you, despite how it advertises itself. Sin markets great, but the product is horrible.

Embedded in every shameful story of our lives, our families, is the reality of that **stain of sin**. And that's why Christ came: to remove the stain with His own pure life and give that life to all who will turn from themselves and receive His life and His death for their sin. **That's the gospel**. And the gospel changes legacies. And for the children of abuse, the families in pain, and even one of the greatest coaches of our time, that's all that really **matters** now.

Sin and shame were overcome by Christ at the Cross. And that's what matters for Isaac, for Rebekah, for Jacob, and for Esau. **And that's what matters** for King David. **And that's what matters** for Joe, Mike, Jerry, and the kids at Penn State ... **and that's all that really matters for you and me.**

Think about your sin and shame ... and then think about Christ and the Cross. Because that's all that really matters.

You need to pray. Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Oh Lord, our Lord. We are struck by the incredible amount of sin and unfaithfulness in this passage. It bothers us because it all sounds so familiar. And yet, we're amazed that You remain faithful to Your Word, to Your promises, and to Your people, even when, and especially when we don't deserve it. And still You send us Jesus ... because we so obviously need a Savior.

So Lord, here You are again, showing grace to the undeserving ... to us. Thank You that no one is beyond Your grace. Thank You that Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Esau, King David, Joe, Mike, and Jerry are not beyond Your grace. Thank You that we're not beyond Your grace. Thank You that the blood of Jesus covers our sins. For we pray, in the Name of Your Son, Jesus, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

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Psalm 20:2; Galatians 1:3-5

"May [the Lord] send you help from the sanctuary and give you support from [on High]! ... May

grace and peace be given to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”