

“Point of No Return”

Genesis 27:30-28:5

December 18th, 2016

Perhaps you've heard the saying "Crossing the Rubicon"? It refers to Julius Caesar and his army's crossing of the Rubicon River in the year 49 BC. In the times of the Roman republic, the Rubicon marked the boundary between the Roman province of France (Gaul) and Italy.

Caesar led a part of his army south over the Rubicon to make his way to Rome. In doing so, he made armed conflict inevitable. The phrase "crossing the Rubicon" has survived to our day referring to those who commit to a risky or revolutionary course of action, similar to the modern phrase "passing the point of no return".

It's serious business when someone gets to a point in time where they can no longer go back. Sometimes people realize this truth in a terrible way. *Remember Lot's wife from our study of Genesis 19:26?* She and Lot were warned to get out of Sodom before God destroyed it and they were not even to look back. As they fled the city, Mrs. Lot stole a glance back to the city, and she instantly became a pillar of salt. Just like that – poof! Sodium Shake!

I'm told if you're in the cockpit of an airplane taking off from an airport, just as its wheels lift off the runway you would hear a crew member call out, "V1." This phrase represents the "point of no return."

As the airplane accelerates toward the end of the runway, the pilot must decide if the plane is moving fast enough for a safe takeoff. This speed must be determined preflight based on several factors, including the air pressure, temperature, speed of the wind, and weight of the aircraft.

The pilot maintains a hold on the throttle as the plane approaches V1 speed, so that he/she can abort the takeoff if something goes wrong. However, after V1, the plane must take off.

With many things in this life, we come to a point of no turning back – a crossing of the Rubicon, so to speak. In the text of Scripture before us today, we see there comes a time in life where we can no longer undo the things – the messes – we have created in life. A point in time comes where nothing can be done to right the ship that has begun to list and take on water (so to speak).

Today's section of sacred Scripture portrays one such incident. Isaac's oldest twin son Esau has ventured beyond that point of no return. He has made his bed having sold his birthright to his younger brother Jacob for a dish of stew. Now he must sleep in that bed.

The first 29 verses of **Genesis 27** tell the story of how Jacob, the younger son, tricked his father into giving him the blessing given to the oldest child. Jacob didn't do this deed alone; he was guided by his conniving mother, Rebekah. Let's pick up where we left off last Sunday morning in the middle of Genesis chapter 27 at verse 30, and we'll read through to verse 5 of Genesis Chapter 28.

Genesis 27:30-28:5:

³⁰Now it happened, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. ³¹He also had

made savory food, and brought it to his father, and said to his father, “Let my father arise and eat of his son’s game, that your soul may bless me.”

³² And his father Isaac said to him, “Who *are* you?” So he said, “I *am* your son, your firstborn, Esau.”

³³ Then Isaac trembled exceedingly, and said, “Who? Where *is* the one who hunted game and brought *it* to me? I ate all *of it* before you came, and I have blessed him—and indeed he shall be blessed.”

³⁴ When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, “Bless me—me also, O my father!”

³⁵ But he said, “Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing.”

³⁶ And *Esau* said, “Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!” And he said, “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?”

³⁷ Then Isaac answered and said to Esau, “Indeed I have made him your master, and all his brethren I have given to him as servants; with grain and wine I have sustained him. What shall I do now for you, my son?”

³⁸ And Esau said to his father, “Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me—me also, O my father!” And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

³⁹ Then Isaac his father answered and said to him:

“Behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth,
And of the dew of heaven from above.

⁴⁰ By your sword you shall live,
And you shall serve your brother;
And it shall come to pass, when you become restless,
That you shall break his yoke from your neck.”

⁴¹ So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, “The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob.”

⁴² And the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said to him, “Surely your brother Esau comforts himself concerning you *by intending* to kill you. ⁴³ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice: arise, flee to my brother Laban in Haran. ⁴⁴ And stay with him a few days, 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 bereaved also of you both in one day?”

⁴⁶ And Rebekah said to Isaac, “I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these *who are* the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?”

28 Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: “You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. ² Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother.

³ “May God Almighty bless you,
And make you fruitful and multiply you,
That you may be an assembly of peoples;
⁴ And give you the blessing of Abraham,
To you and your descendants with you,
That you may inherit the land
In which you are a stranger,
Which God gave to Abraham.”

⁵ So Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Padan Aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.”

The passage explores three relationships among the four members of Isaac’s family.

- Relationship 1 – Isaac and Esau;**
- Relationship 2 – Rebekah and Jacob;**
- Relationship 3 – Isaac and Jacob.**

The first relationship pictured in today’s text is **Isaac and Esau**. No sooner had Jacob departed his father’s presence with Isaac’s blessing, verse 30 tells us Esau comes in from hunting, eager for Isaac to eat the game he sent Esau to prepare for him. *Can you imagine how it might have gone?* Esau was geeked; he bagged his game, and prepared it just as his father liked. Verse 31 tells that Esau was eager for his dad to eat the food so he could bless Esau.

Isaac doesn’t know who Esau is. After all, he thought Esau had just left the building! “Who are you?” Isaac asks. Esau replied, “I am your son, your firstborn (the one who should get the blessing).” With verse 33, reality begins to settle in for Esau. He must’ve recognized Esau’s voice; whatever the case, he was beginning to understand that he was duped by his younger son. He “trembled exceedingly.” His world was coming apart on him; his foundation was rocked!

The late teacher of the *Bible Study Hour* radio program, Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, observes, “Before a great work of grace, there must be a great earthquake. Isaac put his personal love of Esau ahead of the will of God. Down came his idol, and the (structure) 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.” (Quoted in Hughes, 352)

When Esau learned from his father that he had given the blessing to Jacob, his response is heart breaking – verse 34 – “...he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, “Bless me—me also, O my father!”

Isaac must’ve been shaking his head as he said, “Your brother came with deceit and has taken away the blessing!” (V. 35) Esau is getting angry when he responds, “Is he not rightly named Jacob (supplanter; deceiver)? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!” And he said, “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?”

More rationally now, Isaac explains to his grieving eldest son, “Indeed I have made him your master, and all his brethren I have given to him as servants; with grain and wine I have sustained him. What shall I do now for you, my son?”

You can almost hear Esau’s voice rising in agony, “Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me—me also, O my father!” And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.”

“**Hebrews 12:14-17** (our verses of the week) is God’s commentary on this event. Esau tried to repent, but his own heart was too hard; and he couldn’t change his father’s mind. Esau’s tears were not tears of repentance for being an ungodly man; they were tears of regret because he had

lost the covenant blessing. Esau wanted the blessing but he didn't want to be the kind of man whom God could bless! We may forget our decisions, but our decisions don't forget us." (Wiersbe, 30)

Tears mean nothing. Esau wept, but his tears were of frustrated selfishness and not of genuine regret for wrongs committed. He had passed the spiritual point of no return; Esau crossed the Rubicon of Repentance.

Does this disturb you at all? It should, especially if you've only regretted getting caught for doing something sinful, and you haven't truly repented for your sin against God and those against whom you've sinned. The only true repentance is a turning away from sin to do what God desires. To be satisfied with anything less is damaging to your spiritual life, and is potentially damning your soul to eternal hell. (The real troubling thing is that at this very moment you are deceiving yourself by thinking I'm talking about someone else, when I may be talking about *YOU!*)

Some 80 years ago, Governor Pat Neff of Texas, visited the state prison and spoke to the assembled convicts. When he had finished he said that he would remain behind, and that if any man wanted to speak to him, he would gladly listen. He further announced that he would listen in confidence, and that nothing a man might say would be used against him.

When the meeting was over, a large group of men remained, many of them in prison for life. One by one they passed by, each telling the governor that there had been a frame-up, an injustice, and judicial blunder, and each one asking to be freed.

Finally, one man came up to the governor and said, "Mr. Governor, I just want to say that I am guilty. I did what they sent me here for. But I believe I have paid for it, and if I were granted the right to go out, I would do everything I could to prove to be a good citizen and prove myself worthy of your mercy."

This, of course, was the man whom the governor pardoned.

Isaac does pronounce a blessing upon Esau (verses 39 & 40), but it couldn't have been what Esau was looking for. The *NKJV* text here isn't as good as the *NIV* - **Genesis 27:39** - "Your dwelling will be away from the earth's richness, away from the dew of heaven above." The *ESV* reads, "Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and away from the dew of heaven on high." Esau was destined to be second fiddle to his brother for the rest of his life, as would his descendants.

From **Isaac and Esau**, we move to the second relationship mentioned - **Rebekah and Jacob**. Verse 41 reveals that Esau was intent on killing his younger brother, thereby following the second born to Adam and Eve, Cain, who did kill his older brother, Abel.

Word gets to Rebekah who reports the news to Jacob. But, typical to her scheming ways, she devises a plan to protect Jacob. With verse 43, we see she intends to send Jacob away to her brother Laban's protection in her homeland, at least until everything blows over ("a few days"). As we study on in upcoming chapters, we'll see those "few days" turn into 20 years. It is likely

she never saw Jacob again, and only one more mention is made of Rebekah in Genesis (her burial, **Genesis 49:31**).

Rebekah realizes that she must lose Jacob to save him. Rebekah prompts Isaac to bless Jacob's pursuit of a wife from her homeland, instead of the kind of women Esau had married (pagans). She says to Isaac in verse 46, "I am weary of my life." This means she abhors (hates) her life because of Esau's Canaanite wives.

A final thought on Rebekah is in order. She pursued the right thing according to God's Word (Isaac's blessing on Jacob – God proclaimed that the younger would serve the older). But, Rebekah went about it in all the wrong ways. She favored one son (Jacob) over the other (Esau); she dishonored her husband, Isaac, and their son, Esau. Further, she put Jacob up to lying to Isaac and gaining the promised blessing in deceptive ways.

God is never pleased when we resort to deception and justify it because we tell ourselves we're doing the Lord's will. The ends never justify sinful ways! Search your hearts, dear ones, and turn from your own deceit! May this be our aim - **2 Corinthians 4:2** – "But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

We've explored what this passage teaches about **Isaac and Esau's** relationship, and **Rebekah and Jacob's**. The final one it explores is **Isaac and Jacob**. Isaac instructs Jacob to return to his mother's homeland to find a wife, and not to select one among the heathen land in which they dwelt. In so doing, Isaac performs his duty as a God-fearing father. In fact, at this point in time, the only person of the four in this family who is at last beginning to look like one in whose life God is working is Isaac.

In blessing Jacob, Isaac refers to what would become the Church. The word "assembly" in **Genesis 28:3** is the Old Testament term for the church or congregation, and it makes its first appearance in Scripture here. God's people make up the church, and we should strive to give the church high priority in our lives, even as the Church is of major importance to God Himself.

The promise of God to Abraham passed to the son of promise, Isaac. And now, here in Genesis 28, we see the blessing of God being passed on to Isaac's son, Jacob. Verses 3 & 4 repeat much of what we read in **Genesis 12:1-3**.

What stands out clearly throughout this text is "something of immense beauty and grandeur – the invincible determination of God to keep His word despite the prevailing unbelief and unfaithfulness of His people. God fulfilled His word despite Isaac's opposition, despite Rebekah and Jacob's manipulation, and despite Esau's indifference." (Hughes, 354)

Relationship 1 – Isaac and Esau;
Relationship 2 – Rebekah and Jacob;
Relationship 3 – Isaac and Jacob.

Not long ago, we studied the second letter of the Apostle Paul to Timothy. There's a wonderful creed contained therein, which we would do well to commit to memory and live out in our lives (**2 Timothy 2:11-13**)

“¹¹*This is* a faithful saying:

For if we died with *Him*,
We shall also live with *Him*.
¹² If we endure,
We shall also reign with *Him*.
If we deny *Him*,
He also will deny us.
¹³ If we are faithless,
He remains faithful;
He cannot deny Himself.”

The Romans sometimes compelled a captive to be joined face-to-face with a dead body, and to bear it about until the horrible pairing destroyed the life of the living victim. The ancient poet Virgil described this cruel punishment:

“The living and the dead at his command
Were coupled face to face, and hand to hand;
Till choked with stench, in loathed embraces tied,
The lingering wretches pined away and died.”

Without Christ, we are shackled to a dead corpse – our sinfulness. Only repentance frees us from certain death, for life and death cannot coexist indefinitely.