

“Sibling Rivalry”
Genesis 25:19-34
November 27th, 2016

A father spoke of his two children, “My first-grader came home and proudly reported that she was now officially a “Brownie.” Not to be outdone, her 3-year-old brother, Christopher, rushed up to me and proudly announced he was a “cupcake!”

In just about any household with more than one child, kids naturally compete for their parents’ love and attention. And parents swear they love every child equally.

Sometimes, siblings harbor differences and conflict erupts. This was especially true during our nation’s most difficult four-year period of time, the Civil War.

The Battle of Gettysburg divided a Pennsylvania family. John Culp, owner of Culp’s Hill, where Confederate forces assaulted Union troops on the third day of the battle, had one son in a gray uniform, and another son in a blue uniform. Both took part in the bitter fighting for the slopes of the home place.

At the Battle of Bull Run, Frederick Hubbard of the Washington Artillery of New Orleans, who wore a gray uniform, for the first time in 7 years met Henry Hubbard of the 1st Minnesota Infantry, who wore a blue uniform. The brothers were both wounded, and were unintentionally placed side by side in the stable which served as a hospital.

Perhaps the most famous example of sibling rivalry in human history is found in the 25th chapter of the Bible’s first book, Genesis. It is the business before us this morning as we continue working our way through this important part of God’s Word, a series entitled, *The Book of Beginnings: God’s Grace in Genesis*.

Genesis 25:19-34:

¹⁹This *is* the genealogy of Isaac, Abraham’s son. Abraham begot Isaac. ²⁰Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. ²¹Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she *was* barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. ²²But the children struggled together within her; and she said, “If *all is well*, why *am I like this?*” So she went to inquire of the LORD.

²³And the LORD said to her:

“Two nations *are* in your womb,
Two peoples shall be separated from your body;
One people shall be stronger than the other,
And the older shall serve the younger.”

²⁴So when her days were fulfilled *for her* to give birth, indeed *there were* twins in her womb. ²⁵And the first came out red. *He was* like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. ²⁶Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau’s heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

²⁷So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. ²⁸And Isaac loved Esau because he ate *of his* game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

²⁹Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he *was* weary. ³⁰And Esau said to Jacob, “Please feed me with that same red *stew*, for I *am* weary.” Therefore his name was called Edom.

³¹But Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright as of this day.”

³² And Esau said, “Look, I *am* about to die; so what *is* this birthright to me?”

³³ Then Jacob said, “Swear to me as of this day.”

So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised *his* birthright.”

I’ll explore three primary points in today’s passage:

MP 1 – When God’s People Pray (v. 19-23);

MP 2 – A Promise of Posterity (seed) (v. 24-28);

MP 3 – When Partiality Propagates (v. 29-34).

We’ve already studied in-depth the long-awaited birth of Isaac to the elderly Abraham and Sarah. Verse 20 in today’s passage shows us that Isaac was 40 years of age when he married Rebekah. And, the first thing said of their union is that Isaac prayed for his wife (verse 21). The opening verses teach **When God’s People Pray** – “Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she *was* barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived.”

What happened when Isaac prayed for his barren wife? God heard his prayer, and like her mother-in-law Sarah before her, Rebekah conceived when she didn’t have the physical equipment to bear children. God had once again brought life to a lifeless womb!

Verse 22 reveals that Rebekah was herself a woman of prayer. “But the children struggled together within her; and she said, “If *all is* well, why *am I* like this?” So she went to inquire of the LORD.” The original Hebrew language here gives the sense that the preborn infants “crushed each other” inside Rebekah. Rebekah felt as if her womb had become a battlefield.

And, as He did with Isaac, God here answers Rebekah’s prayer, as verse 23 reveals:

“Two nations *are* in your womb,
Two peoples shall be separated from your body;
One people shall be stronger than the other,
And the older shall serve the younger.”

God had an important purpose for each of the babies Rebekah carried. Each of the boys would represent a different nation, two different peoples. And, to demonstrate again that He is sovereign, God instructed Rebekah that the first of the twins to be born would serve the second born. That’s just God’s way. He is not bound to accomplish things as we are accustomed to seeing them being done. God always retains the right and privilege to act as He desires and to bring about things as He desires. Often times, this is very different than we might expect.

In actuality, our main understanding of this first point ought to be that our God is a prayer hearing and prayer answering God. He has instructed us to pray to Him regularly in many parts of His Word, among those **Colossians 4:2** (fitting for the present holiday weekend), “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving...”

Even as I prepared this portion of the message, I had a conversation with one of our members, and that talk compelled me to pray again for her and family as they’ve been through a difficult spell of late. For sure, the need for prayer was evident last Monday in Chattanooga, Tennessee and the school bus accident

injuring several and taking the lives of 6 children to date. I put myself in the parents' shoes as they arrived at the school with no knowledge of whether or not their children were involved, and if so, what condition they were in. The call to prayer went out quickly via social media.

So this text discusses **When God's people pray**. It also touches on the **Promise of Posterity**. The time comes for the two babies to be delivered (some 20 years after Isaac and Rebekah were married – Isaac was 60 years old). The first born was covered with red hair and was named Esau. The latter born was Jacob, whose hand grabbed Esau's heel.

What was the basis for God's choosing the older of the twins to serve the younger? Obviously, only one of the twins would continue the line of the Seed of the woman mentioned back in **Genesis 3:15**. It was God's sovereign prerogative to choose Jacob, and that choice had nothing to do with anything Jacob brought to the table.

The New Testament sheds light on this important event. First, we look to an intriguing passage from the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Rome. **Romans 9:10-13** – "...Rebecca... had conceived by one man, *even* by our father Isaac (for *the children* not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, 'The older shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.'"

"The Apostle Paul (in the Book of Romans) uses the events recorded in **Genesis 25** to demonstrate God's work of election. Before the boys were born, God made a distinction: He chose Jacob and his descendants to receive His revelation, to be the ones through whom the Messiah would come and to be His covenant people. Esau and his lineage would receive none of it. This distinction had nothing to do with Jacob and Esau; it came about by the mercy of God." (Currid, 16)

Just as God had chosen Isaac, the second born, and not Ishmael, the firstborn, so He chose Jacob, the second born, and not Esau the first born.

We are not God; we do not have the same freedoms He does. He has given us much leeway, and we often make poor choices along the way, which result in painful, regretful consequences to our decisions, but His will for us can never be thwarted. God told Abraham that the Son of Promise would be Isaac. Here in **Genesis 25**, God tells Rebekah the next in the line of promise would be Isaac's son, Jacob. As we work through Genesis, we'll see how that continues. Jacob's spiritual descendants are the people of God; from Esau's descendants come the Edomites, a people with a long history of conflict with God's people.

To be numbered among the people of God, we need more than physical birth. Simply because a child is born to two parents who trust in Jesus, that doesn't also mean their child will also trust Jesus for life and salvation. We must be born a second time; born again, born from above in order to be numbered among the spiritual descendants of Jacob. **Parents** - God holds you primarily responsible for the spiritual welfare of your children. You must take every opportunity to lead your children to Christ. God ordains the end of salvation; salvation from sin is fully an act of God's grace that we cannot achieve or attain. Yet, God also ordains the means for salvation, and that is by the faithful preaching/teaching/witness of His Word to bring spiritual

life where it is lacking. To keep your children away from the means of grace, periodically or even rarely attending worship, **is to ensure that you will raise Esau's in your home.** To continually bring your children to worship and the various teaching ministries of the church is to place your children on the path to salvation.

Church - when a child receives baptism, the congregation takes a vow to assist parents in the spiritual nourishment of their children. That means you will take the time and effort to get to know the children and youth in the church, even though they may occasionally intimidate you. You are needed to serve in the various ministries for children, and to take your turn in the nursery. Have a family over to your home for dessert or a meal. Send a note of encouragement in the mail addressed to a child or young person. If you don't see a family at worship one Sunday (today), send them a text, message, or note in the mail letting them know you missed seeing them. Don't just sit there and do nothing. Eternity may rest on you keeping your word.

To this point, we've seen **When God's People Pray**, and a **Promise of Posterity**. Now, we look at **When Partiality Propagates**. The closing section of today's text reveals that Isaac favored Esau, and Rebekah favored Jacob. Never a good idea to pit our children against one another!

A term used four times in each of the chapter's last 4 verses is "birthright." *How many here are the oldest child in their family of upbringing?* By the simple fact we were born first, we have a birthright, meaning, a preferential status among siblings. First, this means the oldest child received a double-portion of the family inheritance (**Deuteronomy 21:17**). Secondly the birthright meant that when the head of the household died, the first-born would assume leadership in the family.

When we look at these twin brothers, we see they were very different, at least in their lifestyles and desires. Esau was a rugged outdoorsman, rough, wild, free boisterous and exciting, a hunter of animals and beasts. Jacob, on the other hand, was a mild man of peace – stable, quiet, thoughtful, civilized - who probably didn't stray far from the homestead. Yet, Jacob was also a hunter of a different kind. As the events of verses 29-34 play out, the cunning hunter (Esau) fell into a better hunter's trap (Jacob's), becoming prey to his own appetites.

Like the previous point, the New Testament provides commentary on this event. **Hebrews 12:16-17** – "Lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. ¹⁷For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears."

Here is how Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle described Esau:

"He is the kind of man of whom we are in the habit of charitably saying that he is nobody's enemy but his own. But, in truth, he is God's enemy, because he wastes the splendid manhood which God has given him. Passionate, impatient, impulsive, incapable of looking before him, refusing to estimate the worth of anything which does not immediately appeal to his sense, preferring the animal over the spiritual, he is rightly called a 'profane person.'" (Quoted in Hughes, 336)

The profane person lives for the moment, showing no concern about the cost. Esau here shows no concern for the birthright, and what they meant spiritually. He relinquished eternal things for momentary pleasure.

Esau came in from the hunt, and he was famished; his primary, if not only concern was to fill his belly with food. It was so much a priority for him, that he was willing to sacrifice something of eternal benefit to him and his family line.

How relevant this is to our day and time. Each of us knows someone (and we may even be related to them!) who have more concern with temporary, fleeting things than they do with everlasting, enduring matters. If you are here this morning and you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, *what on earth could be more important than life everlasting? What have you been investing your time, resources, and talents in that is more important than a forever of bliss and joy? And, if you have children, what kind of father and mother are you preparing them to be?*

In a day of great interconnectedness via social media, even professing Christians can spend a great deal of time cultivating a personality on the Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram that does not honor Jesus Christ in the least. *Will you sell the privilege of being a Christian for the secular stew the world has to offer?*

Like Esau, some are so centered on self that they never, or rarely, get to the point where they consider God's perspective on the things of life. Though we have more Bible versions available to us than ever before, the Bible readily accessible in more various formats than ever before, a plethora of commentaries and bible studies, God's people are deficient in their understanding of His Word, and their ability to live as a people of the Book. Yet, they are well-steeped in the way of the world, just like Esau was.

One commentator writes, "Men will read trash rather than the Word of God, and adhere to a system of priorities that leaves God out of their lives. Multitudes of men spend more time shaving than on their souls; and multitudes of women give more minutes to their makeup than to the life of the eternal spirit." (Quoted in Boice, 742)

Will the day not come when you will search, perhaps with tears, for the blessing of life in Christ, here and forever, and you will not find them?