



This morning, we enter back into Genesis. The last time we were in Genesis was *five months* ago! We ended at the death of Abraham, and now we jump into a narrative of the births and birthright of Abraham’s grandsons, Esau and Jacob. Before we get into the text, I want to remind us of where we’ve been in Genesis up to this point. I’m not going into all details, just a flyover. We’ve been introduced to *who* God is as Creator and also Redeemer. We’ve seen how people struggle for control, and how God calls people to trust him. Yet, so many in this creation trust themselves instead of the Lord. Even as we’ve moved into looking at Abraham’s life, we’ve seen how Abraham’s trust in the Lord waned and he would revert to trusting himself. Yet, we’ve also seen God, who is faithful to his promises and patient towards his creation. He promised that there would be One who would crush the serpent. This would be the “seed of the woman.” This seed would come through the line of Abraham and through him all the nations of the world will be blessed.

So, in Genesis, we’re tracing God’s promise to bring the Serpent Crusher, while also seeing God’s intention for humanity. His design is to reveal his glory to them so that they might be restored in knowing him, loving him, and displaying him. This is what he created all creation for! As I say all of this, I hope that we don’t treat Genesis merely as an academic book where we can increase our knowledge, but we would look at this as a letter from God to reintroduce us to *him*. This was the original intent of Genesis as well. Do you remember who the author of Genesis is? Answer: Moses. Do you remember who the original audience is? Answer: The wandering Israelites. Genesis is to teach them about God and also about how things came to be for Israel – as well as to instruct the Israelites on how to live.

This is the same for us. In Romans 15, we’re told, **“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”**¹ Instruction. What does that mean? The Scriptures were written not just to give us big heads that we *know* things, but they were to teach us how we ought to respond to God and live in this world. And so, Paul says elsewhere that, **“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”**² Genesis is to teach us. I think many of us get that. But did you know that God also gave us Genesis to reprove and correct us? Some of us may have a difficult time with that. We don’t *like* to be corrected. However, if we know God’s intentions are good for us, then I think we ought to welcome it! Like an athlete has a coach to correct their errors; so, we should welcome correction because Paul goes on to say that Scripture is written to train us in righteousness so that we can be complete and equipped for every good work!

Christians, do you want to grow in godliness? Then, I pray we would welcome the teaching, reproof, correction and training of Genesis. This text is beautiful. And while there are many things I could bring out

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 15:4.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Ti 3:16–17.

in this passage, I think there's an overarching message that spans the centuries and both confronts and comforts us in the 21st century. With that, let me give the main idea of the sermon today: **Humans have a desire to take and not to trust God.** As we look at this text, we will see struggle and fighting. And the struggle and fighting happens because there's not a trust in the Lord, but a trust in self. Can you relate to this? If I were to ask you, "Do you trust the Lord?" You might say, "In certain things, yes. But in other things, no." And why is that? You might hear the words and have memorized Proverbs 3:5, which say, **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding."**³ And my questions are, **"How often in a given day do I revert back to leaning on my own understanding?"** And, **"Why do I so easily lean on my own understanding while struggling to trust the Lord?"**

I don't think we'll answer all these questions this morning, but I do think we will see some of the heart of distrust in the Lord, and I pray the Spirit would apply the Scriptures to each of us as we need it. So, before we get into the text, I ask you to pray and ask the Lord to open your heart to what he says.

Let's now read Genesis 25:19-26: ¹⁹These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac, ²⁰and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. ²¹And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. ²²The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. ²³And 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." ²⁴When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. ²⁶Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.⁴

The seed of the woman has transferred to a new generation. Abraham and Sarah had Isaac. Now, we're into the narrative of Isaac and Rebekah. We get a hint that Rebekah is the chosen woman because she's barren. Barrenness is a common theme as it specifically relates to the promised serpent crusher. It relates all the way back to Creation being formless and void and darkness covers the face of the waters. God creates light from darkness. God does the miracle. The serpent crusher will be miraculously born. So, Rebekah (like Sarah) couldn't conceive a child. And then we hear that Isaac prays. Isn't it often through difficulty and pain that God draws his children closer to him? It's when we realize that we can do nothing that we begin to admit that we need the Lord. This reality of prayer is emphasized in this text twice: once with Isaac, and once with Rebekah. This is an important teaching moment for Israel and for us, revealing to us that:

1. Our posture in life ought to be communion with God through prayer.

And prayer is not something we do to impress God. It's not some work of power on our part. I love how a man named Paul Miller wrote about prayer: **"We forget that helplessness is how the Christian life works... The gospel, God's free gift of grace in Jesus, only works when we realize we don't have it all together. The same is true for prayer. The very thing we are allergic to – our helplessness – is what makes prayer work. It works because we are helpless. We can't do life on our own"** (Paul Miller, from *A Praying Life*). Prayer is bringing our helplessness to the One who has no limits, the one with all power and authority and control. Prayer is bringing this to the One who loves us. And prayer is saying, "We trust you and your will – whatever it may be – and we want you."

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Pr 3:5.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 25:19–26.

Isaac and Rebekah praying is an example to Israel. How often Israel simply *did* without thinking about the Lord. They trusted in themselves rather than praying. Yet, what a beautiful example Moses was so many times of going to the Lord and praying – seeking his face. And what an example to us. In our daily living, we kill our desire for control through prayer. I would also add that whatever circumstances you’re going through where you feel out-of-control, I urge you to thank God for them. Even if you don’t feel like it at the moment. And the reason I say that is because, if you’re God’s child, those circumstances are a gift, revealing to you reality. You are *never* in control, but God is. And God only does what is right and good for his children. Will you trust him? Will you pray and lay those burdens down at his feet instead of trying to grasp for control?

This leads me to the second teaching implication in this text:

2. **Our posture in life ought to be dependent on God’s promises.**

In this segment of verses, God’s promise is set apart! God has declared something. This should matter to Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob. God has spoken. Have you ever been to a concert or a musical or an event where there’s a special speaker and when that special speaker or group comes out, everyone goes quiet. Why? Because the whole point is *them!* Remember, the whole point of the Scriptures is God. When he speaks, we ought to listen!

While Rebekah was pregnant with the two sons, there was fighting inside of her. She didn’t understand. I can only imagine the pain she was feeling inside of her body. She cries out to the Lord, asking why this is the case. And God responds: there are two nations inside of her. And then God also says that the older son will end up serving the younger one.

What we have here is one son representing the seed of the woman (the Serpent Crusher) and the other representing the seed of the serpent. The younger son will receive the blessing that through him all the nations will be blessed. The older will follow in the paths of the serpent and will be crushed.

Now, I’m not saying Rebekah understood all of this, but she at least knew two nations were coming from her and the younger would receive the blessing of the birthright. The birthright referred to the passing down of the Father’s blessing to the child. Usually the oldest got that. But not in this case. God has said what will happen. His promise to Adam and Eve and Abraham and Isaac is now being conferred to the younger son.

At this point, from a cultural perspective, some people might say, “Why?! This isn’t fair!” Why would God choose Jacob over Esau? If you want to go into more detail on that, I encourage you to read Romans 9. But what I hope none of you would say is that God chose Jacob because he was more moral than Esau.

That would be absolutely incorrect. What we end up seeing, even in this early stage of Esau and Jacob’s development in the womb is that there’s a struggle for control. There’s not an innate trust in the Lord. We are born sinful. We are born thinking we must protect ourselves and look out for ourselves as #1. Jacob seeks to *take* not trust – even in the womb.

The only answer we can give as to why God chose the younger is *mercy*. Pure mercy. If there’s a reason in Jacob for why God chose him, then Jacob can boast in himself. But mercy is undeserved. Praise the Lord. If you are a believer today, praise God that he showed you mercy! There wasn’t anything inside of you to

warrant his love. If there was, then you could do something to unearn it. But he has set his love on you because he set his love on you! Don't try to figure it out. Savor it.

But I'm getting ahead of the Genesis narrative. As Rebekah gives birth to Jacob and Esau, there's a struggle for who's going to come out first. Esau actually came out first, but Jacob was grabbing his heel. Jacob's name is a play on words. He can be translated as "heel grabber" or "usurper," but I doubt Isaac and Rebekah said, "Oh, let's name our child 'usurper'!" The word can also have connections to the idea of "protector." I imagine that was more in line with Isaac and Rebekah's thinking. The younger will be a protector. That fits the promise of God, right?

What's intriguing, though, is that the narrative moves *very quickly* through the boy's lives. In verses 27-28, we read, "²⁷ When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. ²⁸ Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. ⁵

As Esau gets older, he becomes a skillful hunter while Jacob was a "quiet man," dwelling in tents. I've seen in a study bible, notes saying that Esau was manlier and Jacob was more domesticated in nature. That's *not* what's being said here. Being able to hunt doesn't make you more of a man. Being a "quiet man" doesn't mean you're more domesticated. To hunt has been essential for food throughout the ages. And being a "quiet man" has been essential, too. This phrase for "quiet man" culturally referred to someone who was more of a processor. To dwell in tents indicated certain skills of leadership in a community.

Sadly, at least Isaac played favorites with his boys. He liked the hunter, Esau. Was he forgetting God's Word? Was Isaac leaning on his own understanding? I believe we see foreshadowing here of what takes place later in Genesis. So, yes, I believe Isaac leans on what he can see, and what he naturally prefers, than on God's Word. Do you see how naturally it seems for Isaac to trust himself rather than to cling to God's promise? Can you relate to that, too? You like something or prefer things to be done a certain way, so you essentially don't even apply God's Word to the situation. I can look at my own life, and at times think back on how presumptuous I was. I've thought that just because I thought my way was right, then clearly God would affirm me. I didn't think about God because I thought I was right. I neglected prayer. I neglected communion with the Lord. I just did my own things because I was driven by my own desires.

You know what? Esau follows in his dad's example. Let's read verses 29-34: ²⁹ Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. ³⁰ And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.) ³¹ Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright now." ³² Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" ³³ Jacob said, "Swear to me now." So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. ⁶

Clearly Jacob's name is a play on words. He is not a blessing to the nations. He doesn't seek to bless Esau. He's not protecting. He's playing on Esau's vulnerabilities. The Hebrew phrase for "cooking stew" carries connotations of setting a trap. It's very interesting how Moses writes this narrative. Esau refers to his red color and hairiness. He's a hunter. And in these verses, he acts like a ravenous animal. Yet, who's doing the hunting? Jacob. The quiet thinker is manipulating and setting the trap. Jacob knows what Esau lives for. Jacob knows how to get what he wants. Jacob really is the usurper. He is the heel-grabber.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 25:27-28.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 25:29-34.

But why is Jacob acting this way? He wants the birthright. What's the birthright? It's the blessing that passes from the father to the child. What's the specific birthright Isaac has? Through him all the nations will be blessed. This is what Jacob wants. But here's the thing. I don't think Jacob understands the birthright. I think Jacob is only thinking in terms of power and control. Why do I say that? Because that's how he lives. If he actually trusted God's promise that he would receive it, he wouldn't fight for it. He wouldn't connive. He wouldn't hunt down his brother and prey on his vulnerabilities. This leads me to another application point:

3. Our posture in life, when not trusting God, is to be enslaved to our lusts.

When I use the word "lust," I'm not just talking about sensual desires. I'm talking about any desire we have that competes with God and his design. I could put it this way: a lust is what we want when we want it. And we can know our lusts by how quickly we'll *take* it instead of trusting and waiting on the Lord.

What we see from Jacob is that he's not trusting the Lord. He wants control. He trusts himself. So, Jacob lives by *taking*, not trusting. The same is true for Esau. Esau comes into the house and wants the stew. In the Hebrew, there's a repetition taking place that emphasizes Esau's lust/desire to quench his hunger. Esau just wants food right now. How much does he want the stew? Esau gives up his birthright.

Interestingly, Jacob *wants* the birthright. Esau doesn't care about it. Jacob feels the need for the birthright to get control. I'm not sure Esau feels the same need. Esau's preferred by his dad; so, he probably thinks that he can seel the birthright and still have control. The reality is that neither really care about God. They also don't really care about the substance behind the birthright: God's glory and saving humans from their sinfulness. They care about themselves. And so, their desires control them. As a result, they don't care about each other.

Isn't this the reality of the world we see around us today? We look out for ourselves. We don't listen to God because so many don't really believe that God actually loves them and cares for them. So, we listen to the lies of the serpent and treat ourselves as gods. Oh, what bondage!

And we see this bondage with Esau. Jacob says he'll give Esau the stew if Esau sells his birthright to Jacob. Esau gives up his birthright because he says he's "starving," which clearly he wasn't because he ate, drank and got up and left. And then we're told he "despised his birthright." How did he despise it? He didn't value it.

He didn't value God's promise of a serpent crusher. He didn't value God's promise of a new creation where the curse would be gone. He didn't value people being reconciled to God. Then, later in the Scriptures, we're given this warning from Esau's example: **See to it. . .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.**⁷

Esau wept over not having his birthright. He wished he had it. But he still wasn't repentant. Meaning, he didn't really realize his sin. He didn't admit his sin. He just wanted the birthright – the power and control. Do you live that way with sin? Do you relate to God this way? You regret you sinned because it was stupid, but you don't abhor sin because it's against the Lord and you trusted yourself instead of trusting the loving and holy Creator?

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 12:15–17.

In the book of Hebrews, Esau is a contrast from the people in Hebrews 11, who had faith. Esau didn't trust. He grasped and took. Jacob here also grasped and took. Yet, as we go through Jacob's life, we'll see how God confronts Jacob's grasping heart and turns it into a receiving humble heart.

As I think about this narrative, I can't help but see the myriad of ways I can neglect and despise God's Word because I'm more focused on me having control than on trusting the Lord's goodness and control. This is exactly the temptation of Adam and Eve in the garden. If they believed God was good and that God's ways were right, they wouldn't have taken the fruit. If Jacob and Esau believed God was good and him being in control was right and wondrous, they wouldn't be fighting.

What situations in your life are you grasping for control? In the midst of my chronic pain and broken relationships that I've gone through, I remember a time when this truth hit me: **God never commands me to be in control.** Do I need to be wise? Yes. Do I have to make plans at times? Yes. But do I need to be in control? No. Think about this with your parenting? Are there ways you're manipulating or seeking control instead of trusting the Lord's timing and control? Think about your finances. When they're depleted, how do you respond? Are you like Paul saying, "I've learned in whatever circumstance to be content/satisfied" or is there a panic for control? Think about living in this fallen world. Like Jacob and Esau represent two nations; we as Christians are part of the Kingdom of Jesus and await his coming and we also live in this fallen world. When you hear the news, do you quickly try to fight for control or do you trust that Jesus is in control and calls us to follow in his steps of service?

These are just a few areas I can think this narrative comes to us. And if the Spirit is revealing things to you, it's not because he hates you. It's because he loves you! He's calling you to himself to lay down your grasping for control and to rest in his goodness and grace. And why wouldn't you? He proves his goodness over and over again. And we see this most clearly in Jesus. Jesus sacrificed his control, that he rightfully owned, and came to this earth and took on the form of humanity and sacrificed to the point of death, entrusting himself to the Faithful Creator God. Jesus didn't succumb to lusts. He waited and prayed and trusted. And if you have turned from your sins and turned to Jesus for forgiveness and reconciliation with God – Jesus will continue his serpent-crushing work in and through you! He will work in and through you to remove the heel-grabbing, grasping, taking control and progressively change you so that you are a trusting, humbling, resting child of the King.

So, may we heed the message. **May we trust God and not struggle for control. May we be a communing, praying people. May we be a people dependent on God's promises and not enslaved to our lusts.**