



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### The Power Of Blessing

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~ Scripture: Genesis 27:1-40 ~

### INTRODUCTORY STORY

I read of a young man on 24-hour suicide watch in a psychiatric hospital. He was tall, handsome, well-mannered, and an excellent student. Had straight A average high school and for 3 years of college. But the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of his senior year he caught the flu—and everything changed. He missed so many classes in a required PE course that his grade dropped automatically to a B. When the young man found out there was no extra credit...no way to substitute other classes...and no way to change his grade or even drop the course, he fell into instant despair. He left the instructor's office...went back to his dorm room...and tried to take his life.

Seems the story started years earlier with a brilliant but driven father who had gotten all A's himself--and demanded the same from his oldest son. How hard this young man had tried all his life to gain his father's favor. Now failing to get an A in a tennis class brought the death of a dream—and nearly his own! What a heartbreaking tale. It left a haunting, indelible impression when I first heard it. It was like this young man was so close to something he couldn't quite define—something always in sight, but never within reach.

I believe that “intangible something” he longed for all his life was his father's blessing==his father's unconditional love and approval. He missed his father's blessing, and it broke his spirit.

That's reminiscent of another son in the Old Testament—ESAU. The story of Esau & his twin brother JACOB is told in **Genesis 25 & 27**. I'd like to take you through the story as a storyteller.

### THE STORY OF MISSED BLESSING

Esau was the older of the two sons—by minutes. Jacob grabbed his heels on his way out of the womb. That's what the name Jacob means: *heel-grabber!* Which is figurative language for “*deceiver*”. That was only the beginning of a lifelong struggle between these two brothers. By the time they reached adulthood, Jacob had also grabbed his brother's birthright and his blessing!

One day, their father, Isaac, told Esau to go and bring in fresh game for a savory meal. The time had come. The long-awaited blessing would be given to him.

With the skill and abilities of an experienced hunter, Esau went quietly and quickly about his work. He did everything just as he had been told. In almost no time, a delicious stew was prepared.

Why, then, was his father trembling so when Esau went into his tent? Here he is, full of anticipation, standing before Isaac and saying: [**Genesis 27:31-34**]

*“My father, sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.” His father Isaac asked him, “Who are you?” “I am your son, your firstborn, Esau.”*

*Isaac trembled violently and said, “Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him—and indeed he shall be blessed!”*

*When Esau heard his father’s words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry, and said to his father, “Bless me—me also, O my father!”*

Little did Esau know that when his aged and nearly blind father had called him to his side, someone else had been listening—Rebekah, the mother of Esau & Jacob. Even though earlier (before the boys were ever born), she had been told by the Lord that there were two nations in her womb, and the older would serve the younger (cf. **Gen. 25:23**), Rebekah took matters into her own hands—to push along God’s plan OR her own agenda. [We are told in **Gen. 25:28** that Rebekah loved Jacob and Isaac loved Esau. RED FLAG!!! Trouble is ahead!]

As soon as Esau went out into the fields to hunt, she ran to *her* favorite son, Jacob, with a cunning plan. “Hurry”, she said, and bring two choice young goats from the flock and I will prepare a savory meal for your father “*just the way he likes it*” (**v. 9**).

Then she dressed Jacob in his brother’s clothing and put animal skins on him to simulate Esau’s rough and hairy arms-hands-neck. That was the easy part. But emulating Esau’s voice almost blew the whistle on them. “*The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau,*” said Isaac (**v. 22**). So, even though Isaac was a little skeptical, their plan worked. Isaac did not recognize Jacob, and ended up giving him the blessing (**v. 23**).

There was more at stake here than what you might think. Couldn’t Isaac just pronounce a second blessing on Esau...slap Jacob on the wrist...and get things back in the right order? NO, it wasn’t as easy as all that. This was a formal oath==the blessing was binding and irrevocable.

You see, the firstborn son (Esau) was entitled to the birthright. The birthright was a child’s inheritance (i.e.: a double share of his father’s wealth). But it did not become “official” until the blessing was pronounced. So, anywhere along the line, a father could take the birthright away from the oldest son and give it to a more deserving son. But after the blessing was given, the birthright could no longer be taken away. Jacob needed his father’s blessing to make the birthright he had swindled Esau out of years ago binding.

So, Esau returns and discovers that he has lost the blessing to his brother, Jacob. He is devastated. And he cries out bitterly. NOT over the inheritance (e.g.: cattle + sheep + land)—he had already given that up. It was much more personal than that. What ripped at his heart was the loss of his father’s blessing==the place of esteem / being #1 in the family. For Esau, it meant he no longer held the place in his father’s heart he thought was his. Mind you, the dysfunction of this family (i.e.: parents playing favorites) set up this whole tragic scenario. Nevertheless. . .

Filled with hurt, Esau cries out a second time [**v. 38**]: “*Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, O my father!*” Then Esau wept aloud.

Finally, Isaac says to him [**vv. 39-40**]: “*You will live away from the earth’s richness, and away from the dew of heaven above. You will live by the sword, and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless and decide to break free, you will throw off his yoke from your neck.*”

Not much of a blessing, is it? Not the words of high value and acceptance he longed to hear. But it’s all Isaac had left; he too had been betrayed.

Can you feel the anguish in Esau’s cry: “*Bless me—me also, O my father*”? This same painful cry and unfulfilled longing is echoed today by many people searching for their family’s blessing —men & women whose parents, for whatever reason, have failed to bless them with words / deeds of love & affirmation. People just like the young man in the psych ward. People with whom you rub shoulders every day. Perhaps even YOU!

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BLESSING

Let's talk about the importance...the power of **the blessing**—especially the *family* blessing—this morning. By blessing I mean “communicating unconditional love & acceptance” to another person. It's a need we all have. And, it's also within our power to bless others. We can be:

- Parents blessing children
- Friends blessing friends
- Teachers blessing students
- Bosses blessing their employees ← If you are in a supervisory capacity, what an opportunity you have!
- Church blessing our community ← Regional equipping center to bless / bring God's blessing...

I can't overstate the importance of blessing in our families, yea in all our relationships. Genuine acceptance is a need that goes unmet in thousands of homes today (just as it did in Esau's). The family blessing plays an important role in starting us off in life (i.e.: launching).

Now, it's not practiced the way it was in Biblical times (although it is still bestowed in Orthodox Jewish homes today pretty much as it was in Esau's day). For sons & daughters back then, receiving their fathers' blessing was a momentous event...a once-in-a-lifetime occasion...like a rite of passage. It gave them a tremendous sense of being highly valued by their parents; plus it pictured a special future for them. In our day, we have the opportunity to bless our children, families, and loved ones daily.

When we do, we endow our children with TWO THINGS (plus many more): PROTECTION  
INTIMACY

### I. PROTECTION

All across the country, cults and gangs are holding out a counterfeit blessing to our children. They provide a sense of belonging and family that sometimes we fail to provide (e.g.: personal attention, affection, security). Our kids are yearning for family blessing, and the world holds out many “things”, many “influences” (many driven by the Internet) who beckon kids to an imaginary table. “The aroma may draw them to the table; but after eating, they are left hungrier than before.” (*The Blessing*, Smalley & Trent, 19).

I've seen this up close. ILLUSTRATION> In my first pastorate (in Mankato, MN), there was a cult movement that got started when a false teacher by the name of Rama came through town. Many young people and adults got caught up in it (e.g.: moved out of their homes, quit their jobs, dropped out of school to follow this guy). One teen in our church was “snagged”, and by her own admission it happened in large part because needs at home were not being met. Now, 30+ years later, she's still struggling to find her identity spiritually.

*Parents*, find ways of blessing your children. [The rest of this sermon series will focus on “how”.]  
Blessing is powerful; so is the lack of it. Don't withhold it!  
*Single parents*, you have the hardest job in the world.

The best protection we can offer our children and grandchildren is to provide them with genuine acceptance. That will go a long way toward reducing the likelihood of their finding what they're looking for at home in the clutches of a “group” or in an “immoral relationship”.

True for marriage partners, too! Husbands, find ways of blessing your wives; wives find ways of blessing your husbands. You have no idea the power of blessing to protect your marriage.

Look at Esau's life! Yes, he went on to father a nation—EDOM / EDOMITES—which, by the way, gained its name from his nickname, *Edom*= *red*. Esau was born with a ruddy complexion. And, when he said to Jacob, “Quick, let me have some of that red stew (*from the lentils*)!”, from that point on he was also called Edom. Edom as a nation did break away from Israel, and settled south of Palestine. They were always enemies of Israel, and often battled. There are many references (in the Old Testament) to the Edomites

celebrating when calamity struck Israel.

What was carried out between brother-nations all too often gets carried out in families for generations. Withholding blessing is one way the sins of the fathers are visited on their children even to the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> generation.

## II. INTIMACY

The blessing is not only an important defense against finding acceptance in all the wrong ways, but it is also crucial for the formation of intimate relationships (especially marriage).

One of the most familiar verses in the Bible is **Genesis 2:24**—“*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*”

“Leave and cleave” we call it. ☺ Many people have trouble “*cleaving*” (i.e.: drawing close, being deeply attached to, strongly devoted to, emotionally faithful to)—because they have trouble “*leaving*”. Leaving is much more than moving away physically:

- In the Old Testament, the farthest most people would actually move away from their families of origin was across the campfire into another tent.
- In the New Testament, an addition was usually built onto the home for the newly weds.

Leaving home entails not only *physical* separation, but also *emotional* separation.

Truth is, most people who have missed out on their parents’ blessing have great emotional difficulty leaving home. You may live halfway around the world...you may not have seen your parents for years...they may even be gone from this earth. But “unmet needs for personal acceptance can keep a person emotionally chained to his/her parents’ home—and to the past—so that they are unable to genuinely cleave to another person in a lasting relationship” [*ibid.*, p. 19f].

Here’s some advice someone gave years ago: “*Let the past be your teacher, never your master.*”

## CONCLUSION

The word “*blessing*” pictures God’s original plan for mankind (as we saw two weeks ago). We were created for blessing. And one of the chief ways God blesses people is through the families we grow up in.

ILLUSTRATION> Not everyone is so blessed (“lucky”, we often say). Two weeks ago down at Red Bird, we met a man who along with his wife was trying to fill a terrible gap for a little one year old girl. Her biological mother is 17 years old, and the mother of two children. She had looked at one and said, “I love this one; I can take care of her.” But to the other one, “This one I feel nothing for; I want nothing to do with her.” So started a scramble on the part of both sets of grandparents to gain custody—not out of concern for the child, but because there is welfare money to be had. So Tim, our new friend and a shirttail relative, is hoping to be able to raise this little girl—and “bless” her with some love and stability. Let’s pray for that to happen.

It may be that you did indeed experience the blessing and are experiencing it now. If you DID GROW UP with “the blessing” (unconditional love & acceptance) and can see how your family communicated that to you, then rejoice and be glad. You may want to find a way to thank them for that. . .and to pass this life-changing gift along to your children and to those closest to you.

[In a few minutes, when we sing our closing song, we are going to bring forward the pieces of paper on which you have written the name(s) of someone who has blessed you—and offer a collective “thanksgiving” for what they provided you.]

If you DID NOT GROW UP with your parents’ or your family’s blessing, may I hold out hope for you this morning. In the weeks to come, we are going to be looking at ways you *ESAU*s who missed out on the blessing (through no fault of your own, may I add)—and all your life have longed for it—may receive it from

God (i.e.: often through others). You may get it from a coach, a teacher, a youth leader. [If you are any of those, do you realize the position you are in?]

God will never leave us where we are. He can use a lot of things to move us to the place of blessing. The church—God’s spiritual family—is one of His greatest instruments. Within our church, two resources immediately available to you are:

- 1) STEPHEN MINISTRY: To hook up with a Stephen Minister, see me or stop by the table;
- 2) SMALL GROUPS: To join or start a small group, see me...Linda VH...Bonnie S.

More than anything, I want us to walk away from this service with a greater awareness of the power of blessing in our lives. Harnessed within each of us is the power to bless. Let’s do it!

## ADDENDUM<sup>1</sup>

I know some of you are wondering how Jacob could resort to such treachery and still be considered a Patriarch. Indeed, he was the third link in God’s plan to start a nation from Abraham—a nation that would be “a blessing (and a light) to the world” and from whom would come the Messiah. These were not perfect heroes; each was capable of lying, deceit, and selfishness. Sometimes God accomplishes His plan *in spite of* (not *because of*) us.

Anyway, I think you have to view Jacob’s life in stages. These are outlined in the *NIV Life Application Study Bible* on p. 51:

- #1: Jacob is a heel grabber (i.e.: grabs Esau’s birthright and the blessing).
- #2: Jacob experiences life from the other side (i.e.: he is deceived by Laban).
- #3: A new role as grabber, this time grabbing on to God and refusing to let go. Now his relationship to God becomes essential. His name is changed to Israel—the name given to the nation that comes forth.
- #4: Finally Jacob is grabbed by God. Late in life God finally has a firm hold on him —so that he won’t make a move (e.g.: to come at Joseph’s invitation to Egypt) without God’s approval.

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<sup>1</sup> This section is added to help you understand how God can use even a rogue like Jacob. It was not part of the sermon as preached on Sunday.