Sunday, July 26, 2026

Speaker: Pastor John Vanderwindt
Scripture: Genesis 26:34-28:9
Sermon Title: Family Characters and God's Mercy
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Last week, we talked about ***Genesis 25*** in having Esau and Jacob and the selling of the birthright. And we're now jumping to the beginning of ***Genesis 26:34***.

Genesis 26:1-33, we dealt with a few weeks ago when we saw how Isaac and Abraham seemed to be saying the same thing, and we put the two together. And today we're going to look at ***Genesis 26:34-Genesis 28:9***.

It's a bit of a longer story, but as I read, I want you to pay attention to the four characters within the story.

It is Isaac's family. You've got Isaac, his wife Rebekah, and their twin sons, Esau and Jacob. And I want you to begin thinking about how each person interacts within the story. Because in this, today, we're going to see how we are much like them, and how God, through this story, also proclaims His sovereignty and rule, making sure that what God has promised comes true.

So let us begin:

Genesis 26:34-35

34 When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also
Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. 35 They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah.

Genesis 27

1 When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for
Esau his older son and said to him, "My son."

"Here I am," he answered. 2 Isaac said, "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my
death. 3 Now then, get your equipment—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country
to hunt some wild game for me. 4 Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to
eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die."

5 Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open
country to hunt game and bring it back, 6 Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Look, I overheard
your father say to your brother Esau, 7 'Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to
eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the LORD before I die.' 8 Now, my son,
listen carefully and do what I tell you: 9 Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats,
so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. 10 Then take it to your
father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies."

11 Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "But my brother Esau is a hairy man while I have smooth
skin. 12 What if my father touches me? I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a
curse on myself rather than a blessing." 13 His mother said to him, "My son, let the curse fall on
me. Just do what I say; go and get them for me."

14 So he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and she prepared some tasty food,
just the way his father liked it. 15 Then Rebekah took the best clothes of Esau her older son,
which she had in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob. 16 She also covered his
hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goatskins. 17 Then she handed to her son Jacob
the tasty food and the bread she had made.

18 He went to his father and said, "My father." "Yes, my son," he answered. "Who is it?" 19 Jacob
said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat
some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing." 20 Isaac asked his son, "How did you
find it so quickly, my son?" "The LORD your God gave me success," he replied.

21 Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really
are my son Esau or not." 22 Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said,
"The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." 23 He did not recognize
him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he proceeded to bless him. 24
"Are you really my son Esau?" he asked. "I am," he replied.

25 Then he said, "My son, bring me some of your game to eat, so that I may give you my
blessing." Jacob brought it to him and he ate; and he brought some wine and he drank. 26 Then
his father Isaac said to him, "Come here, my son, and kiss me." 27 So he went to him and kissed
him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said,

"Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed. 28 May God give
you heaven's dew and earth's richness—an abundance of grain and new wine.29 May nations
serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your
mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be
blessed."

30 After Isaac finished blessing him, and Jacob had scarcely left his father's presence, his
brother Esau came in from hunting. 31 He too prepared some tasty food and brought it to his
father. Then he said to him, "My father, please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may
give me your blessing."

32 His father Isaac asked him, “Who are you?” “I am your son,” he answered, “your firstborn,
Esau.” 33 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 will be blessed!” 34 When
Esau heard his father’s words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father,
“Bless me—me too, my father!” 35 But he said, “Your brother came deceitfully and took your
blessing.”

36 Esau said, “Isn’t he rightly named Jacob? This is the second time he has taken advantage of
me: He took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing!” Then he asked, “Haven’t you
reserved any blessing for me?” 37 Isaac answered Esau, “I have made him lord over you and
have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So
what can I possibly do for you, my son?” 38 Esau said to his father, “Do you have only one
blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!” Then Esau wept aloud.

39 His father Isaac answered him, “Your dwelling will be away from the earth’s richness, away
from the dew of heaven above. 40 You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But
when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck.”

41 Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said
to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.”

42 When Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son
Jacob and said to him, “Your brother Esau is planning to avenge himself by killing you. 43 Now
then, my son, do what I say: Flee at once to my brother Laban in Harran. 44 Stay with him for a
while until your brother’s fury subsides. 45 When your brother is no longer angry with you and
forgets what you did to him, I’ll send word for you to come back from there. Why should I lose
both of you in one day?”

46 Then Rebekah said to Isaac, “I’m disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If
Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life
will not be worth living.”

Genesis 28

1So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him. Then he commanded him: “Do not marry a
Canaanite woman. 2 Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother’s father Bethuel.
Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother. 3 May
God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a
community of peoples. 4 May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham,
so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God
gave to Abraham.” 5 Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way, and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban
son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, who was the mother of Jacob and Esau.

[6] Now Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to Paddan Aram to take a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he commanded him, "Do not marry a Canaanite woman," [7] and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Paddan Aram. [8] Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; [9] so he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, in addition to the wives he already had.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Let's pray. Dear Lord, we come to You today. Lord, we thank You for Your Word. Lord, we thank You that Your word is active, and that it is relevant to today's life as it was then. Lord, we ask that You will open our ears, that You will open our hearts to see, Lord, where we too are like these people. And, Lord, we ask for Your words to be spoken. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Before we get into the four characters, we need to talk a little bit about this concept of birthright and blessing.

Birthright. When you receive the birthright, which we saw last week, Esau sells a free bowl of stew to his brother Jacob. When you receive a birthright, you receive a double portion of the inheritance. So if you have three children, the inheritance would be divided into four. The oldest would get two, and the next two would each get one.

But with the birthright, there also came extra responsibilities. For example, the birthright only went to the male children in the family. And so any female children in the family would be the responsibility then of the oldest brother or the oldest son.

If parents needed anything, it was the oldest child who would be responsible for taking care of them. If a sister was married and their husband died, the oldest son would be responsible for taking care of the sister once again.

So the double portion is to provide for the extra responsibilities of the oldest son. But along with the birthright came a blessing. And the blessing was first of all, just for this aspect of prophecy, prosperity.

And we see here in the story of Isaac, how he begins with his blessing in ***Genesis 27:28***, where he says, "*[28] May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness—an abundance of grain and new wine."*

That's the first part of the blessing. But there was also, with the blessing, a prophetic pronouncement about their future within the blessing. They would also give a blessing from God to say, *"Here is what God will do for you and your descendants."*

You can see that in ***Genesis 28:3-4***, when Isaac sends Jacob off, *"[3] May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. [4] May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham."*

And so a blessing is a very important part of receiving the birthright. And you'll notice that at the end, Jacob's blessing is very similar to the blessing which God gave Abraham.

In ***Genesis 27:29*** there it says, *"[29] May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed."*

And we see that also in ***Genesis 12:3***, when God gave the blessing to Abraham. ([3] *I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

And so we see here how important the blessing is.

We also need to make sure that we understand the setting of the story. Because when we look at this story, and when I remember the story from Sunday school, the age of Esau and Jacob was probably around a teenager's age, maybe a little bit older.

Here's a reality check. They're 77 years old. Because if we do the math as to when they were born and Isaac is 137, it puts Jacob and Esau at 77. They are well established. It says in the last part of ***Genesis 26***, that Esau got married. He's got a family of his own. Jacob is still living at home. And there he is now.

Isaac hits 137 and he figures he's going to die soon. Isaac actually ends up living to be 180. He had a long way to go. But I understand because like many of us, when we get to the age that our brothers and sisters pass away, we think, *"Oh, our time is soon."* Because if you remember, Ishmael died at the age of 137.

So that's the setting, the story. And what I'd like to do is I'd like to kind of jump around in the story, but look at these four characters and how they respond to everything. So we're going to do a kind of a character study today, and what we'll see is the truth underneath every character and how God works in it all.

Let's begin with Jacob. He's the one we most know of. Jacob begins, and Jacob knows the truth. Jacob knows that the birthright and the blessing belongs to him. So Jacob knows what the truth is. But Jacob, even though he knows the truth, he listens to the story his mother tells him. He knows that he will receive the blessing from Isaac, but yet he follows the wrong instructions which he has been given.

You know, it's interesting that we often talk about David as the deceptive one. Here, Jacob is the deceptive one. Here, Jacob is simply following instructions. He is doing as someone told him.

And how often don't we at times go, *"Well, I know that this person that I respect, says that this is a good thing, so I will do this even though I know it is wrong."* Jacob knew it was wrong to deceive his father in this way, but yet he follows the instructions. Why? Because in Jacob's mind, the end justifies the means. Right?

God had promised that Jacob would receive this blessing. And so in the end, if this is the way it happens, then it must be okay, rather than saying, *"Look, if God has promised this, it will happen."*

In fact, Jacob even goes a step further. He actually uses blasphemy in the process. Because as he speaks to Isaac and Isaac asks him, *"How did you get it so quickly?"* His response in ***Genesis 27:20*** says, *"[20]The LORD your God gave me success."*

Now he is using God's name to justify what he is doing. And he's saying, *"God gave me this success. God gave me this opportunity. So here it is. It must be blessed by God."* And we see here what happens, right? In actuality, this does not. Jacob gets the blessing. Yes, he does, but it actually destroys the family.

Because we see after Esau doesn't get the blessing, we hear about how his goal is to kill Jacob. And so Jacob flees for his life. And I love the piece where Rebekah says in ***Genesis 27:44***, "[44] *Stay with him for a while until your brother's fury subsides."*

In other translations, it says, *"Stay with him for a few days."*

Twenty years later, he comes back. A few days isn't just that little bit. It turned into a long time. And in that lifespan, when we look at Jacob as he's going through, we see that he lives a life of deceiving and being deceived. That becomes what he's known for.

But in all of this, we see that God still holds him.

In ***Job 12:16***, it says this, *"[16] To him belong strength and insight; both deceived and deceiver are his."*

Throughout this, we see God at work.

Let's jump to Rebekah. Rebekah also knows the truth. Rebekah knows because God told her before the kids were born that the younger would be served by the older, that Jacob would have the birthright and the blessing, and that the promise of the Messiah would go through him.

But Rebekah hears this piece in which Isaac says he's going to bless Esau. And Rebekah's first thought is, *"No, Jacob's supposed to get this! Maybe God needs a little help. Let me help Him out a little bit so that this happens."*

There are times in our lives where we think, *"Well, I know God said this is going to happen. Let me make sure it happens."* Because we don't really believe that the impossible is possible with God. Maybe God needs our help.

And in fact, Jacob even confronts her with it. And he says to his mom in ***Genesis 27:11-12***, *"[11] But my brother Esau is a hairy man while I have smooth skin. [12] What if my father touches me? I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a curse on myself rather than a blessing."* And her response, *"[13] My son, let the curse fall on me."*

“Even though I know what I’m doing is wrong, it'll still be blessed by God because it's still within God's work.”

So she continues by arranging for Jacob to flee. And notice how she does it. She's like, *“Jacob, you've got to go. Isaac, you know how much of a pain Esau's wives are? I think if we're going to be living well, we have to make sure that Jacob doesn't get a wife from here, because women here are no good.”*

And Isaac goes, *“You're right. Maybe we should send them to the old country. Get away from your brother's family.”* And so that's what they do.

But that is Rebekah again trying to make sure that it happens. Here's the sad part. Rebekah never sees her son again. Jacob, whom she loved, wasn't away for a few days. He was away for 20 years. And by the time he comes back, Rebekah has died.

Let's jump to Esau. Esau is one who knows the truth. He knows he gave his brother the birthright. He knows that with the birthright comes the blessing. But Esau really doesn't care.

At the end of ***Genesis 25***, last week, we saw that Esau despised his birthright. And if you look at his lifestyle and where it talks about how his wives grieved Isaac and Rebekah, you know that he doesn't really care. Until… he doesn't get what he wants. Right?

How often do we see people who say, *“I don't want anything to do with God, but if something bad happens, then I'm going to blame God for it. Because why isn't God blessing me? Because He should be blessing me.”*

But Esau is like, *“No, I don't want anything to do with it.”* And actually, we see how he responds to Isaac as he says that he already has given away the blessing. In ***Genesis 27:34***, it says, “**34** *When Esau heard his father’s words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, “Bless me—me too, my father!”* And he cries and he weeps and he sheds tears.

But these are not tears of repentance. There is no repentance in Esau. We can see in the part that we read in ***Genesis 28*** where Esau is saying, *“I see what he's done with my brother.”* First of all, he says that he’s going to kill him, and then he’s going to marry somebody else, because he knows it will tick off his parents. There's no repentance in this man.

And the other thing which happens to Esau is he right away blames Jacob. He's like, *“Here he goes. He did it again. It's his fault. He first stole my birthright, now he stole my blessing”*

And he sees that the other person is the problem for his problems, rather than looking at his own life. And so he vows to kill Jacob.

There's a story similar to this. Way back at the beginning of Genesis, we have Cain, who is before God with his sacrifices. And Cain's sacrifices were not acceptable, and Abel's were. And Cain vowed to kill his brother.

And part of the blessing which Isaac gave to Jacob was that his brothers would be under him and that Jacob's descendants would rule over him. And we see throughout the Old Testament there is this conflict with Edom and Judah.

The Edomites are the descendants of Esau. And yet we also see that last part where the yoke will be broken. We see that the last Edomite we know of is Herod in the New Testament, in which he kills all the baby boys.

There is no repentance, and he figures out a way to take vengeance on his own.

And then we get to Isaac. Isaac also knows the truth. I'm sure that Isaac, from the minute he prayed with Rebekah early on, and Rebekah prayed about the children tousling in her womb, that she was told about how Jacob would be the one to receive the birthright and the blessing.

But Isaac loved Esau, and Isaac loved the food that Esau made. And so Isaac's feelings overruled the Word of God.

Isaac got caught up in the feelings of, *"This is what I want. This is what I enjoy, this is what I like. This is what makes me happy. And I should be happy, shouldn't I?"* And so Isaac gets caught up in this whole place of, *"I know what's true, but here's what I want, because I want it to be good for me, and I want it to be good for my son Esau, because I love him."*

And when Esau comes and he says to his father that he is his firstborn, notice what it says in ***Genesis 27:33***. ***33*** *Isaac trembled violently."* Isaac understood what he did. Isaac understood how he was beginning to step outside of what God had called him to do.

And Isaac repents because the very next words in that verse says, ***33*** *… I ate it just before you came and I blessed him—and indeed he will be blessed!"*

Isaac knew it. If the Psalms had already been written in Isaac's day, Isaac could have sung the Psalms if David in ***Psalm 51:17***, where it says, "***17*** *My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise."*

And then we are reminded of the Apostle Paul in ***1 Corinthians 10:11-12***, where it says, "***11*** *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.* ***12*** *So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!*

We have scripture to remind us about who we are and how easy it is for us to slip away.

But we have a character in the story which isn't named specifically, but is the main character of the story, and that is God. God is the main story in this place. God is the one who is directing all of these things and working through them all.

Because we know that God doesn't ***know*** truth. God ***is*** truth.

Jesus in ***John 14:6*** says, *"[6] Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Jesus ***is*** truth. God ***is*** truth, and God accomplishes His will.

There is nothing that we can do to have God's will not happen. But that, of course, doesn't give us the right to do as we please. God accomplishes will, and when He reveals His will to us, we then have to respond to that.

And God's accomplishing of His will happens in spite of… and through sinful humans.

Donald Grey Barnhouse puts it this way: *"The evil is still evil though God uses it for good. … We must say respecting all the ways of men of whatever kind they be, they shall eventually praise God; and, however contrary to His commands, shall assuredly both accomplish His will and glorify His name."*

Proverbs 19:21 (ESV) says this, *"[21] Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand."*

God's mercy comes through in this story as well. He preserves Jacob. Jacob gets the blessing. Even though the sinful actions of all four humans were displayed, God accomplished it.

Romans 9:14-16 says, *"[14] What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! [15] For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."[16] It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy."*

And so we end with this. Of these four characters:

Do I see myself in one or more of these characters?

Do I see myself as Jacob just following the crowd and saying, *"Well, they said it was okay, so then it must be okay?"*

Do I see myself as Rebekah thinking, *"Well, God said this was going to happen, and I don't see it happening, so let me make it happen?"*

Do we see ourselves as Esau, who says, *"I don't want anything to do with God, but I still expect you to bless me?"*

Or ***do I see myself as Isaac***, where I say, *"I know what God's Word is, but my feelings sometimes override that, and I still do what I want?"*

And maybe the next question that needs to be is, ***"Where is God inviting me to form my character to be more like His?"***

And this is not about moralism. This is about being transformed into who God has created us to be. This is about hanging out with Christ so that we become more like Christ. So that we can see Him not only within ourselves, but we can be transformed by the Holy Spirit to be more like Him.

As the Praise Team comes up, I'd like to read part of a psalm which I heard just parts of this morning in prayer before church. It's ***Psalm 19:7-14***. I want to close this with this as our prayer.

Dear Lord, we know that your law is perfect and refreshes the souls, that your statues are trustworthy, making wise the simple. Lord, that your precepts are right, giving joy to the heart, that your commands are radiant, giving light to the eyes. Lord, the fear of you is pure, is enduring forever. And Lord, your decrees are firm and all of them are righteous.

Lord, they are more precious than gold, much more than pure gold. They are sweeter than honey from the honeycomb. By them, Lord, we are warned. In keeping them there is great reward.

But Lord, can we discern our own errors? Lord, forgive my hidden faults. Lord, keep your servant also from willful sins that they may not rule over me, because then, Lord, will I be blameless and innocent of great transgression.

Lord, may these words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, my Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Amen.