

Text: Genesis 25:19-34

Title: Some means of God's grace

Time: 1/4/2009 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: I mentioned when we studied the first half of this chapter that I was surprised to find that it made for a good Thanksgiving Day message. And then we found even a Christmas theme in Isaiah's treatment of the chapter with the gifts of the wise men of the East.

Now as we finish the chapter, we come to a portion that I had intended on covering prior to the power outage we had that caused our cancellation. But I am thankful that we were forced to save this portion to this week, because it actually contains some great truth for us as we contemplate the beginning of a new year. If there is anything that you and I cannot do without in 2009, it is the grace of God. I have titled the message this morning "Some means of God's grace," and I believe that our passage discusses three of these.

Now before I begin, let me explain that the Bible tells us that we need God's grace in order to have new life in Christ, and also that we need God's grace in order to grow in Christ. The means of grace that saves our souls is different from the means of grace that sustain us and help us to grow in Christ-likeness. Roman Catholics talk about means of grace, but as they do they fail to understand this distinction. Life and growth are two different things. You can have life without growth, but you cannot have growth without life.

We have spiritual life through faith alone in God's grace; and we experience spiritual growth through faith plus works in God's grace. When Roman Catholics speak of the means of grace, they talk about faith plus works as the key to having eternal life, not merely growth. The works they refer to are especially the seven sacraments systematized by Peter

Lombard in the twelfth century: infant baptism, church confirmation, the mass, penance, extreme unction (last rights), matrimony, and ordination. The Roman Catholic view of each of these is far removed from the Bible view of the means of grace, which we will find in this passage. Here we find means or works of grace by which believers who are alive by faith alone may grow into greater Christlikeness.

I want us to see three means of grace here that will be important to us in the year ahead. The first is the key to spiritual life, and the second and third help us grow.

I. Faith in the mercy of God is the means of God's grace to save our souls (vv. 23-26a; Rom. 9:8-13, 30-33).

Illustration: I treasure the advice that I can remember that my Dad gave me as a boy growing up. My problem is that I did not listen to his advice much when I was a boy growing up, so I cannot always remember all the good things he told me.

I do remember, though, that Dad used to tell me that there are only two kinds of people in any context, producers and consumers. He usually began to opine on this principle as he prepared to tell us to weed the garden. He was clear that we kids were consumers and not producers, and that it was his job to teach us to be a producer and not a consumer. Weeding the garden was a useful step in this long process.

Application: Those categories, consumer vs. producer, kind of sum up some of the differences Isaac saw in his two sons. Verse 25 tells us that Isaac and Rebekah named their firstborn Esau. You might conclude after reading the verse that *Esau* means *red* or *hairy*. It actually does not. *Red* is the idea behind Edom (v. 30), and *hairy* is the idea behind Seir, another name for the people of Esau. But as best as I can tell, *Esau* is related to the Hebrew word meaning *to make* or *to produce*. By way of

contrast, Jacob is named after his brother's heal (v. 26). Jacob means *heal*.

This difference between the boys was designed by God to make a theological point about the means of God's grace to save our souls, and verse 23 explains this point. The phrase *the older shall serve the younger* is better translated *the greater shall serve the lesser* or *the stronger shall serve the weaker*. The Lord uses the comparative form of the words for *great* and *small* (as does Paul's Greek quotation in Rom. 9:12). His point is not only that older is serving younger, but also that greater is serving the lesser, the stronger is serving the weaker.

Paul addresses the significance of this in great detail in Romans 9 (vv. 8-13, "That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."; vv. 30-33, "What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.").

Paul's point is that there is only one way to enjoy the salvation blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. You must yourself

be a child of promise. It is not by being the greater or the stronger or the better by doing more good than bad (Rom. 9:11). God's purpose according to His sovereign work of election is that our salvation would be based not on our merit, but on His call to salvation, on His promise.

The means to experience salvation by His call and His promise is not to do our works, but rather to believe that promise. Salvation is by faith, not by works. We simply trust that promise; we have faith in His call. Paul specifies the content of this call in the last verse of the chapter: "whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed!"

Have you heard the call to believe in God's promise of salvation in Christ? Have you turned from your sin in repentance and faith in the sacrifice of the descendant of Abraham on the altar of Calvary for your sins? Even now He calls. Will you believe and be saved?

II. Prayer in the presence of God is a means of God's grace to face difficulty (vv. 19-22, 26b).

Illustration: We humans are not natural-born waiters. Naturally, we want what we want when we want it, and the when is normally now. Young kids cannot wait to get at those presents on Christmas morning. They go to bed on Christmas Eve having received the promise that presents are on their way, and there is no sleeping in on Christmas morning.

Application: Well, God often makes promises and then asks us to wait before we see them fulfilled. We need grace to wait in a way our natures are not inclined to do.

Isaac and Rebekah were the couple of promise, and yet they had to wait twenty years before they saw their promise fulfilled. In the meantime you will remember that we read about all of Abraham's children with Keturah, and then all of Ish-

mael's twelve sons. The only one who didn't have a son was the one to whom God had promised, "You will have a son."

Still, God is a trustworthy God who wants us to trust Him while He asks us to await His blessing on our lives. How do we find the sustaining grace to wait even in the face of great difficulty? Only through prayer (vv. 21-22). Here we have specific prayer for a specific need, and then a prayer for wisdom given a set of circumstances. Isaac and Rebekah are demonstrating that prayer in the presence of God is a means of God's grace to face difficulty.

They illustrate the same principle about which Paul counseled the church of Philippi: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Undoubtedly, the year ahead will bring difficulty and the need to wait for promises to be fulfilled. How will your prayer life fare in 2009? You will not experience the fullness of God's grace to face difficulty without it.

Before we leave these verses, I want us to pause and think about what they say about the lives that were in Rebekah's womb. Note that they are not called part of Rebekah's body. Verse 22 clearly indicates that the entities who struggle in the womb of Rebekah were children or literally sons. These were not merely globs of tissue struggling in her womb; they were children. It is not above God's pay grade to tell us when a child is a child, and He directs very clearly here that unborn children are the sons and daughters of their parents. They are not their mother's body.

III. Spiritual privilege from the hand of God is a means of God's grace to accomplish His will (vv. 27-34).

Application: That Jacob was a tent dweller likely refers to his trade as someone who raised livestock (Cp. Jabal, Gen. 4:20). This was the provision of God's hand that was a means of grace for Jacob to accomplish God's will for his life.

Illustration: As residents of New Boston we were given an emphatic reminder of the fact that we take a lot of material blessings and privileges for granted as Americans. When our power went out we could not flush the toilet. There is a stream that comes under the road up the hill from the church that provided us with water to flush our toilets.

The night we got our power back (Tuesday night; it went down the previous Thursday), I went upstairs and noticed that our 5 gallon jug of toilet-flushing water had been used up and not replaced (again). I cannot do justice this morning to the sigh that this produced in me after a long day's work. Fulfilling my fatherly duties, I naturally asked my son Brandon why every time I come home the toilet water jug is empty. He gave me one of those Brandon shrugs that kind of means he pleads the 5th and refuses to answer on the grounds of self-incrimination.

Well, before I tramped up that hill again to get water, the power came on, and I never enjoyed flushing a toilet quite as much as I did that evening. We all have a tendency to take our material privileges and blessings for granted.

Application: How much more this can be true when it comes to spiritual blessings! Verse 34 sums up the condemnation of this passage on the example of Esau: He despised his birthright. To own a birthright in the family of the Abrahamic covenant was as much a spiritual privilege and responsibility as it was a material one. You were to carry on the family estate, but you were also to carry on the hope of faith in the Abrahamic covenant (25:5-6).

Esau had more important things on his mind. On this particular day, the more important thing on his mind was a bowl of lentil stew. (My wife has a great recipe for this, by the way, if you are interested.) The God-given privileges and blessings of his birthright meant about as much to Esau as an empty dish. A bowl full of stew was far better.

The writer of Hebrews makes clear that because Esau lacked an appreciation for the spiritual privileges and blessings that God had given to him, he lacked the grace that he needed to do God's will (Heb. 12:15-17, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.").

As born again believers, we have great spiritual privileges that we must not undervalue, neglect, or even despise if we are going to accomplish God's will for our lives. The birthright of believers includes the right to pray, the right to pray with other believers, the right to fellowship with the Lord, the right to know the filling of the Holy Spirit, the right to join a local church, the right to faithfully gather for worship, the right to instruct our children in the faith, the right to read God's precious Word for ourselves faithfully and grow by it. These are our birthrights, each one a privilege we do not deserve, purchase for us with the precious blood of Christ.

So you have better things to do? Well, so did Esau, and God says we need to be warned when this is the case. Do not despise your birthright in Christ. Spiritual privilege is a means of God's grace to accomplish His will. This birthright is ours at great cost to our Savior.

Conclusion: These are some means of the grace of God available to us. It begins with faith in God's promise to save. Faith in God's mercy is the means of grace that brings new life from spiritual death.

Do you know that you have received that grace this morning? If so, as believers Christ has provided us with great spiritual privileges that we ought not despise, and chief among these is the privilege of prayer. May 2009 be a year of the proliferation of God's saving grace and God's growing grace at New Boston Baptist Church for His glory.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*