

Text: Genesis 26:34 – 28:9

Title: “Man’s bitterness in the midst of God’s blessing”

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Introduction: The gall bladder produces a fluid called bile or gall that helps our small intestine digest fats. Gall bladder disease happens when the bile is not allowed to escape the gall bladder for some reason. In this case infection can come, the other parts of the digestive system do not work properly, and all this can cause severe abdominal pain.

Job knew about gall bladders and the bile they produce. In his complaint against the way God was treating him as he suffered he exclaims, “His arrows surround me. Without mercy He splits my kidneys open; he pours out my gall on the ground” (Job 16:13).

The word Job uses when he mentions the *gall* of his gall bladder is related to the word we read in Gen. 26:35 about the effect that Esau’s wives had on Isaac and Rebekah. The phrase *which were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah* is literally *which were a bitterness of spirit for Isaac and Rebekah*. It is the same word used to describe Esau’s cry when he discovered that the blessing he believed was his had gone to Jacob (27:34, “he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry.”)

There was a gall in the family of God here that was building up, creating an infection, and producing severe pain, and all this in the chapter that describes the passing of the blessing of Abraham from one generation to the next.

What we have described for us in this portion of Genesis is the bitterness of man in the midst of God’s blessings. The blessings of God in our lives are always threatened by our own heart’s proclivity for a life of bitterness. This bitterness often keeps us from enjoying the fullness of God’s rich

blessing. I want us to notice some of the natural tendencies of our hearts that cause us to experience bitterness, in spite of the fact that we are unquestionably the fortunate objects of God's rich blessing as His people here this morning.

I. Misplaced affections will cause bitterness in the midst of God's blessing (26:34-27:4; 27:46-28:9).

Illustration: Now if I were to call on you right now and ask you to define the word *affection*, you might have some trouble because it is one of those words that we understand in context but have a hard time putting a dictionary definition to. We know a good definition for the related adjective *affectionate*: "having a kind or loving disposition toward someone else." But what is an *affection*?

I was surprised to read in Noah Webster's dictionary that an *affection* is literally, "the state of being affected by something." According to that dictionary, you are affected by something when you are impressed, moved, or touched by something. So an affection is the thing that impresses, moves, and touches you in a special way. A misplaced affection is something that should not impress, move, or touch you in a special way, but it does so anyway.

Application: I want us to notice two possible misplaced affections common to us as God's people.

1. Friendship with the world can be a misplaced affection.

This is the problem with the wives of Esau. One thing you will notice if you read slowly through this passage is the fact that family relationships are emphasized over and over again. 56 times do we read phrases like *your father, his father, his son, her son, my father, my son*. But of Esau's wives, we only read that they were the daughters of Heth. They really did not belong,

and so they were a difficult problem for Isaac and Rebekah, because they were not of the faith.

A generation earlier, the family of God understood this. Rebekah was fetched from afar for Isaac precisely to avoid this tragic outcome. But now, a generation has passed and the standards that protected God's family from the influences of the pagan land they lived in a generation before no longer seemed necessary for some reason. Esau married outside the faith. His affections were misplaced because friendship with the world is enmity with God. The result was a bitter one.

2. The pleasures of this life can be a misplaced affection (v. 2).

Isaac is convinced of the brevity of his life in this passage. We know that he was 100 years old when Esau married his first two wives (He was 60 when Esau was born, and Esau married when he was 40), and that he lived to be 180 (35:28). We do not know exactly how old he is during the events of chapter 27, but some believe that his concern to pass on the blessing was prompted by the death of his brother Ishmael, who died when he was 137. This would make Isaac 123.

So he still has 50-60 years to live, but he clearly did not know that (v. 2, "I do not know the day of my death.") You and I do not know the day of our deaths either. God says this truth should regulate our affections. We ought to be more affected by a desire to do God's will than a desire for experiencing the pleasures of this life. We could die tomorrow. We need to do God's will today. We saw this truth in our study of James: "For you do not know what will be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

II. Misdirected schemes cause bitterness in the midst of God's blessing (27:5-17).

Illustration: J. Hudson Taylor was the founder of the China Inland Mission, whom God first used to open that vast country to the gospel, to win tens of thousands of its people to Christ, and to leave behind him the work of twelve hundred missionaries. His son and daughter-in-law wrote a biography of his life that has an intriguing title, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*. The first chapter of that book is entitled "An Open Secret," and the authors there ask the question right up front: "What was the secret, we may well ask, of such a life?" Here is their answer:

"Hudson Taylor had many secrets, for he was always going on with God, yet they were but one – the simple, profound secret of drawing for every need, temporal or spiritual, upon the fathomless wealth of Christ."

One who has learned about the fathomless resources available in Christ comes to understand that God's work does not need misdirected schemes in order to get done. Taylor's motto for ministry was "God's work done God's way for God's glory shall never lack God's supply."

Application: I want us to use that motto to learn some lessons from the example of this family about misdirected schemes.

1. Misdirected schemes involve a good cause; they are an effort to do "God's work."

The passage before us makes clear again that Esau was the greater and Jacob the lesser (v. 15). This important contrast between these twins reminds us of the prophecy of chapter 25 that defined the will of God for them (25:23, "And the Lord said unto her [Rebekah], 'Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.'" ).

God was going to use the boys as an illustration of salvation truths, that salvation does not come to us as a result of our personal greatness or natural birthright, but rather as a result of God's gracious choice. For this reason, it was God's will that the greater should serve the lesser.

Esau had already sold his birthright for a bowl of soup, and the birthright and blessing of Abraham are inseparable in the Abrahamic covenant (Heb. 12:16-17, "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."). Esau could not have the blessing after losing the birthright.

Rebekah and Jacob were doing the Lord's work here. They had a good cause. Yet our passage is clear that their scheme is falling far short of Hudson's motto. This is God's work not done God's way, and it is a temptation to which God's people have fallen repeated ever since the days of Rebekah and Jacob's schemes. We must not only evangelize, but do so the way God says to. We must not only worship, but do so the way God says to. We must not only care for our homes, but do so the way God says to. God's work done our way cannot expect God's blessing, even though these misdirected schemes involve a good cause as an effort to do God's work.

2. Misdirected schemes involve manipulation, a lack of honesty; they are pragmatic, not "God's work done God's way."

Did you notice that Jacob objects to Rebekah's plan for all the wrong reasons? (vv. 11-12). Jacob's objection to his mother's plan was not, "Mom this is not right," but rather "Mom, this is not going to work, and when it fails I'm going to look foolish."

Focusing on what will or will not work rather than on what is or is not right is called *pragmatism*, and pragmatism always leads to manipulation and a lack of honesty, because in our sinful world manipulation and dishonesty are often quite successful.

But the ends do not justify the means in this passage. The means are judged by God in spite of the successful ends achieved. One commentator (Leupold) notes the following long-term consequences of the scheming of Rebekah and Jacob in this passage: “(1) Rebekah and Jacob apparently never saw one another again after the separation that grew out of this deceit – an experience painful for both; (2) Jacob, deceiver of his father, was more cruelly deceived by his own sons in the case of the sale of Joseph and the torn coat of many colors; (3) from having been a man of means and influence Jacob is demoted to a position of hard rigorous service for twenty years” (2:758) (through the deception of Laban).

In the short run, the manipulation and dishonesty of pragmatism can bring some impressive results, even in the work of God. But in the long run, it becomes apparent that the fulness of God’s blessing on the work has been missing.

Evangelist Billy Graham is a sad example of God’s work done man’s way, not God’s way. His policy of ecumenical evangelism sanctioned apostates and Roman Catholics as gospel collaborators, whereas God has told us to come out and be separate in gospel ministry from false gospels (2 Cor. 6:14, 11:3-4). In the short run, it seemed that many conversions happened. But in the longer run, we look around at our world and realized that during the life and ministry of Billy Graham our nation was plunged into paganism.

This was no third Great Awakening for us, and I believe we must say that it was not because we lacked God’s supply. This work was not God’s work done God’s way, but man’s way.

3. Misdirected schemes involve a lack of solemnity; they forget that God's work done God's way must be done "for God's glory."

Jacob was concerned about his being discovered "as one who mocks" (v. 12). Isaac did not discover their mockery at first, but the fact that you and I have been discussing it for some time this morning shows that he was discovered after all. There is a lack of reverence here, a certain kind of mockery of what the Lord holds to be solemn and sacred. The scheming of Rebekah and Jacob made a mockery of Isaac and the exchange of the blessing from generation to generation. Personal aggrandizement was more important than the glory of God.

Conclusion: There is more that causes spiritual bitterness in this context, and we will focus on those in our next message. When gall is misplaced in the body, it causes inflammation, infection, disease, disability, and pain. When bitterness flows through the body of Christ, His bride suffers from the same conditions.

Misplaced affections—a love of the world and its pleasures, and misplaced scheming—doing God's work man's way for man's glory, created the gall of bitterness that ultimately destroys the unity and peace of this family of God in spite of the Lord's gracious blessing upon them.

We too have been graciously blessing with joy unspeakable and full of glory. What will we do with our blessing? Will it be corrupted with misplaced affections and misplaced schemes? Will the enemy have his day of destruction with us as well? The choice is ours. May we repent of what is misplaced in our hearts and lives, and seek the blessing Taylor knew—God's work, done God's way, for God's glory shall never lack God's supply.

“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*