

Text: Genesis 26:34 - 28:9 – Part Two

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

Time: February 1, 2009 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: This is part two of our look at man’s bitterness in the midst of God’s blessing from Genesis 26-28. In part one we noticed that 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.

You may remember from last time that 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.

Last time we saw that misplaced affections and misdirected schemes can turn God's blessing into bitterness for us. We will notice two more things in this category this morning.

I. Mistaken confidence causes bitterness in the midst of God's blessing (27:18-40).

Illustration: You know what it is like to experience the consequences of a misplaced confidence. I do too. Coming home from basketball practice Friday night I noticed a couple of lights on in the church, so I parked my car and went over to the church to turn out the lights.

The steps to the back of the church had not yet been shoveled from the storm we had on Wednesday, so when I exited the church I had a difficult time seeing where the steps were to descend to the parking lot. Halfway down I experienced a mistaken confidence. I put my foot where I thought there was a step, but there was none. As a result, I tripped and did not have to worry about finding steps under the snow the rest of the way as I tumbled downward.

Application: We can miss God's blessing when we are placing our confidence in things that are bound to let us down, when we take a step only to find snow without concrete beneath. God wants us to place our confidence in Him, for He never lets us down.

Note three mistaken confidences from our passage.

1. Mistaken confidence is confidence is one's own understanding rather than the word of God.

This is Isaac's problem in this whole situation. Isaac is physically blind, but he uses his sense of touch and smell to compensate. I think that this physical limitation illustrates the more serious spiritual limitation he had.

God's word had said that Jacob was to receive the blessing (Gen. 25:23, "And the Lord said unto her, 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."). Isaac's understanding told him that Esau was a better and more worthy man for the job. He was leaning on his own understanding rather than the clear direction of God's Word.

What does Solomon say about this in Proverbs? "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (3:5-6). Mistaken confidence is confidence in one's own understanding rather than the word of God.

Confidence in the word of God alone is the historic Protestant doctrine called *sola scriptura*. As orthodox Protestants we believe that Scripture is inerrant, authoritative, and sufficient for our every need for faith and practice because it is the very word of God in a verbal and plenary sense. When it comes to our confidence, we place it where Isaiah says to do so: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (8:20).

2. Mistaken confidence is confidence in apparent results (v. 20).

Most commentators feel that Jacob reaches a low point as he invokes the Lord's name in support of his lie here. But notice

that it is Isaac that has the mistaken confidence. Here someone is invoking God's name, and who can argue with the apparent results? The meal was delicious.

There are a lot of leaders today who invoke God's name and point to their results. Yet they do not deserve our confidence for these things, because confidence in apparent results is mistaken confidence. In spite of the meal he ate, Isaac was being deceived.

The history of revival in our land has important lessons for our gospel ministry in this regard. It was the new measures of Charles Finney that brought the Second Great Awakening to an end in the 1830's, but they did so by pointing to some great initial results. In spite of the crowds of Finney's early ministry excitement, he would write the following in his *Letters on Revival* (1845):

"Efforts to promote revivals of religion have become so mechanical, there is so much policy and machinery in them, so much dependence upon means and measures, so much of man and so little of God, that the character of revivals has greatly changed within the last few years, and the true spirit of revivals seems to be fast giving way before this legal, mechanical method of promoting them."

On the earlier apparent results of his new measures, he confessed to "spurious revivals" during which "many supposed converts are numbered, when in reality there is not a genuine convert among them." [Quotations from Ian Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 294.]

Confidence in the size of a crowd or the popularity and renown of a name is misplaced confidence. Remember the counsel of Jonathan to his armorbearer when tempted by this misplaced confidence: "And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of

these uncircumcised: it may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6).

3. Mistaken confidence is confidence in our own worthiness (27:36).

Esau believes that he has been robbed of something he deserved, something that belonged to him, something for which he was worthy. He was sadly mistaken. He was not worthy of the blessings or the birthright, and they were never actually intended for him in the first place. His confidence is his own worthiness was misplaced confidence.

Whenever we are assessing a situation under the conclusion that we deserve better, we are sadly mistaken. What do you and I deserve as sinners condemned as law-breakers before a holy God? What have we been given as sinners justified before our gracious God? The correct answers to these questions will help us see that confidence in our own worthiness, whenever it raises its ugly head, is mistaken confidence indeed.

Rather than demanding something better like Esau, our disposition ought to be more like the prodigal who returned to his loving father: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke 15:18-19).

This is confidence in the Lord's ability to save the unworthy. That is the one confidence that is never misplaced, for God is faithful. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

II. Miserable grudges cause bitterness in the midst of God's blessing (27:41-45).

Application: Our passage teaches us some important truth about our grudges.

1. Our grudges come from our heart, not our outward circumstances (41).

Do you remember the words of Christ on the cross as He was slaughtered by that angry mob? "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." We fail to respond that way because we are not like Him. We tend to excuse the grudges we hold in our evil hearts against others by claiming that they are justified by outside circumstances. We have "good reason never to darken the door of that church again," so we say.

None ever suffered the wrong that Christ did on the cross. He prayed for the forgiveness of the perpetrators of this suffering. He even argues for their forgiveness—"they know not what they do." When have we ever said that about someone who caused us to suffer?

We have no excuses for our grudges against others as disciples of Him. If we bear a grudge, we need to get our heart right, because it is the heart that is decisively wrong, not the circumstance.

2. Our grudges bring us deceptive comfort.

Rebekah averts disaster not only for Jacob, but also for Esau in this passage (v. 45). Yet Esau experienced a deceptive comfort by the very emotion that threatened to destroy him and his family (v. 42, "thy brother Esau, as touching thee, doth comfort himself, purposing to kill thee").

God wants us to experience a different kind of comfort when we are wronged, the comfort that comes from the ability to forgive because we have been forgiven. Paul makes this point in Eph. 4:31, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clam-

or and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”

There is indescribable comfort in having God’s ability to forgive, because that ability comes from all that Christ has done for us. This ability is only available to those who have experienced God’s forgiveness in Christ as His children. When we know Him, we can be like Him. When we have experienced His forgiveness, we can give the same to others. There is indescribable supernatural comfort for our aching wronged soul here that the world of grudges and malice around us will never know.

When it comes to our need for this comfort of the ability to forgive, the Lord gives a dire warning to those who comfort themselves falsely with their grudge in Matthew 18. You will remember the parable of the king who forgave his servant the great debt, and the servant who was unwilling to forgive a fellow servant much less. Verse 34 gives this warning to those who would ruin blessing with their grudge: “And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.”

Conclusion: May God deliver us from the bitterness of man in the midst of His blessing. Misplaced affections, misdirected schemes, mistaken confidences, and miserable grudges all come very naturally to our flesh. Only with the help of the Holy Spirit can we have victory of these misplaced areas of our lives that keep us from the fullness of His wonderful blessing.

Who then shall be saved from this bitter ruin of blessing? With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

“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*