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Sermon Notes

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The Strange Case of Isaac's Faith-filled Blessings

Hebrews 11:20

Faith is given BOTH to enable you to live well AND to die well.

Matthew Henry: “Though the grace of faith is of universal use throughout our whole lives, yet it is especially so when we come to die. Faith has its great work to do at the last, to help believers finish well, to die in the Lord, so as to honor Him by patience, hope, and joy, so as to leave a witness behind them of the truth of God’s word and the excellency of His ways, for the conviction and establishment of all that attend them in their dying moments.”

Why did the Author choose these strange moments from the lives of these three great patriarchs?

All three references to these great men of faith focus on the END of their lives, when they were DYING.

- By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau at the end of his life
- By faith Jacob blessed Joseph’s sons at the end of his life
- By faith Joseph spoke about the Exodus and gave instructions about his bones at the end of his life

WHY?? This world is not your home

A.W. Pink: “A Christian ought not to be passive in death, and die like a beast. No, this is the last time he can do anything for God on earth, and therefore he should take a fresh and firm hold” on God by faith

Balaam said, ***“Let me die the death of the righteous!”***

I. The Faith of Isaac at Death: Overcoming Fleshly Dimness

Hebrews 11:20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

A. Isaac's Life a Disappointment

1. Isaac lived the longest of the four major patriarchs... 180 years
2. BUT less known about Isaac by far than Abraham, Jacob, or Joseph
 - a. Some twelve chapters devoted to Abraham's life
 - b. Similar length of treatment for Jacob and Joseph
 - c. But for Isaac, other than brief mentions, we get two chapters: Genesis 26-27
3. With Isaac, less of Abraham's triumphs of faith, and less of Jacob's failures
4. BUT the feeling is one of spiritual mediocrity
5. Isaac began his life as a miracle baby
6. As a young boy, he travelled with his father Abraham up Mt. Moriah in one of the most amazing spiritual encounters in history
7. BUT the life that began so brightly, like so many others after him fizzled out in mediocrity

B. The Complex Circumstances of the "Blessing of Jacob and Esau"

1. The focus of Hebrews 11:20... the blessing of Jacob and Esau...Genesis 27
2. Very spiritually complex and entangled account

John Owen: "There is no other story in the scripture filled with more intricacies and difficulties as unto a right judgment of the things related, though the matter of fact be clearly and distinctly set down. The whole represents unto us Divine sovereignty, wisdom, and faithfulness, working effectually through the frailties, infirmities, and sins of all the persons concerned in the matter."

Simply put: it is a complex event woven through with human weakness and sinfulness in which faith ultimately triumphs and God's will is done.

C. The Fleshly Dimness of Isaac's Faith

1. Genesis 27:1 should be taken more than literally

Genesis 27:1 When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see

- a. Isaac's physical blindness is essential to the story
- b. But his spiritual dimness of vision is every bit as essential to the story
- c. Faith = the eyesight of the soul... Isaac's spiritual discernment and perceptiveness was greatly diminished
- d. Sometimes in scripture, we have to look beyond the merely literal interpretation and see the spiritual principles behind it

John 13:30 As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. AND IT WAS NIGHT.

- e. Dimness of sight in this case is seen to be a moral, spiritual issue as well as physical

Deuteronomy 34:7 Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone.

2. Isaac's problem: a fleshly love for life

- a. In every generation, believers are called upon to discipline their fleshly appetites so that they are not ruled by them
- b. We are not worldlings whose god is our stomach

A.W. Pink: "If we live to eat instead of eating to live, our spiritual vision is bound to be defective. Discernment is a by-product, the fruit and result of the denying of self and following of Christ."

Moses denied himself when he refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter and chose instead a life of slavery and persecution with the people of

God. For this kind of commitment, Moses' discernment was every bit as sharp the day he died as when he began to lead God's people.

c. Isaac LOVED a good meal

Genesis 25:28 Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

d. Esau provided him with the meat he craved

e. So... Isaac loved Esau far more than Jacob

f. Sadly, in this Isaac was not much different EXTERNALLY to Esau who sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew

3. Isaac's choice: Esau over Jacob

a. Intrinsic to the whole account of the blessing is the STEW... the meat that Isaac loved and craved

Genesis 27:1-4 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 weapons-- 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."

b. Clearly he intended to give the patriarchal prophetic blessing to his son of choice: Esau, NOT Jacob

c. Here he was out of step with Almighty God as we shall see

d. Rebekah knew her husband... the way to his will was through his stomach... Isaac's love for stew was uppermost in her strategy to steal the blessing for Jacob, her favorite

Genesis 27:5-10 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."

4. This love for game was almost certainly a symbol of a whole life lived pursuing simple, fleshly tastes rather than the things of God
5. The resulting dimness was so pathetic that this great patriarch couldn't tell the difference between Jacob and Esau, except by touch and smell

Genesis 27:22-27 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 blessed 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.

D. The Purpose of God Revealed to Rebekah

1. The other key to this whole family tragedy was the purpose of God as clearly revealed NOT TO ISAAC BUT TO REBEKAH
2. While the twins were still in her womb, they were struggling painfully within her
3. God revealed his purposes to her before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad:

Genesis 25:23 The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

Romans 9:11-13 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-- in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

4. Rebekah clearly inquired of the Lord concerning which of the two sons He had chosen; Isaac apparently did not

Genesis 25:28 Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

5. So, Isaac loved Esau and chose him over Jacob... But God hated Esau and loved Jacob in the love of election
6. Isaac should have kept his tastes under control AND he should have inquired of the Lord what His purposes were for the twins
7. Rebekah's discernment was better... but she had her problems too

E. The Faith and Faithlessness of Rebekah: The Ends Don't Justify the Means

1. As the boys grew up and it became clear that Isaac was preferring Esau, Rebekah had a clear problem
2. She should have foreseen disaster coming.... She should have warned her husband; prayed for him; she MUST have told him the word of the Lord concerning these twins; he must not have heeded it
3. 1 Peter 3 gives advice to wives
4. By the time the events of Genesis 27 occur, it must have seemed TOO LATE to her
 - a. Isaac clearly intended to give the patriarchal blessing to Esau... to the wrong son
 - b. She had faith to perceive the RIGHT son
 - c. AND she had faith to perceive the SIGNIFICANCE of the patriarchal prophetic blessing

- d. BUT SHE DID NOT HAVE FAITH enough to seek to change the situation in a godly manner
 - e. The only thing she could come up with was subterfuge... lying... deception... dressing Jacob up like Esau and telling her son to LIE to his dying father
 - f. She believed the END JUSTIFIED THE MEANS
 - g. God ordains both the end and the means
 - h. God never chooses means inconsistent with His holy character
5. Modern readers of the account may ask: "What else could she have done?"
- a. She could have prayed
 - b. She could have persuaded and pleaded
 - c. She could have done this years ago

F. The One Bright Spot: How Isaac's Faith Triumphed in the End

1. Isaac failed to discern that Jacob was lying to him, ate the stew he craved so much, and gave to Jacob the blessing, thinking all the while it was Esau

Genesis 27:28-29 May God give you of heaven's dew and of 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."

2. As soon as the blessing was done, Jacob left and Esau suddenly came in with another bowl of stew
3. Isaac asked a few questions, suddenly discerned the truth

Genesis 27:33 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!"

4. Despite the fact that the blessing went to Jacob against his intentions, he saw God's hand in it, and said "AND INDEED HE WILL BE BLESSED!!"
5. His heart was with Esau, but his faith overruled his natural tastes and loves and he set his seal of approval on what God had done

A.W. Pink: "Here too we behold the strength of Isaac's faith; as soon as he perceived the providential hand of God crossing his natural affections, instead of murmuring and rebelling, he yielded and submitted to the Lord."

6. Esau then pleaded with Isaac to give him another blessing... he pleaded with tears
7. Isaac gave him these words:

Genesis 27:39-40 "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."

G. Isaac a Prophet

Hebrews 11:20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

1. In both of these blessings, God was speaking through Isaac in a prophetic sense
2. God was communicating His purposes through Isaac
3. In the first case, Isaac was unwittingly speaking of Jacob
4. In the second case, Isaac was knowingly speaking of Esau
5. Only God can foretell the future

Isaiah 46:9-10 I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. ¹⁰ I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

H. Isaac's Faith and "The Blessing" of Jacob

1. The “blessing” of Jacob was far more than merely earthly blessings of good harvests and the servitude of his brothers
2. It was to be the next in line of the patriarchal blessing of Abraham

Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

3. This blessing is focused on throughout Genesis... Isaac blessed Jacob again

Genesis 28:4 May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham

4. It was to be the ancestor of the savior of the world, Jesus Christ

Galatians 3:9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Galatians 3:14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Romans 9:5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

I. Summary

From this example of Isaac, we learn that someone’s faith can be dimmed by fleshly indulgence over a long period of time; as a result we can trouble our families greatly by not perceiving God’s will in certain key situations; but for all of that, faith will still triumph even in the midst of great human weakness and frailty; God’s sovereign purposes overrule all things and His will is done in the end.

II. Applications

- A. Come to Christ!! None of this Matters at all if you don’t know Him!!
- B. Prepare to Die Well so you can live well step by step
- C. Isaac: Beware of Spiritual dimness

1. Beware of raising Esau's that only love a good meal and a good time, and sharing in those loves but not sharing your love for Christ
2. Beware of the growing spiritual dimness that comes from coddling a beloved son and missing out on what God is saying and doing
3. DISCERNMENT
 - a. What is God's will?

Philippians 1:9-10 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ

- b. What are Satan's deceptions?

2 Corinthians 2:11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

Ephesians 6:11-12 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

4. May the leaders of the homes of FBC be men of powerful spiritual perception and clarity... minds so saturated with the word of God and the promises of God that you are very perceptive in what God is doing to bring about His promises
5. May the wives of FBC share their faith and their insights and the word that God has given them with their husbands so that the two are on the same page and moral disasters (like Rebekah and Jacob deceiving their blind father and swindling their unsuspecting son/brother) can be avoided