

Prevailing Grace: A Troubled Upbringing

Intro: Jacob is an interesting but unlikely biblical patriarch. Abraham stands out for faith, Isaac for peaceful persistence, and Jacob—wasn't he a great deceiver? He was, and a man of intrigue and conflict, a polygamist, a poor father to his many children; a man of great successes, but of many sorrows as well. Listen to his own summary of his life as he responded to the respectful welcome of Pharaoh of Egypt. **“The days of my sojourning are 130; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning”** (Gen.47:9). In point of fact, his life was full of struggles. Today we will reflect upon some of Jacob's troubles and ask the question, What do the “few and evil” years of the patriarch teach us about God's love for us?

Proposition: God's love prevails over all human failures and conflicts.

Do you remember your childhood and youth as a happy time? Or was it unhappy, and you're glad it's behind you? Oddly, many happy memories somehow consist of some unhappy details as we learned to negotiate and experience life. Jacob's life was a struggle, and it began even before he was born. Let's consider his troubled upbringing.

1. Struggle in the womb (25:21-23) [Struggle = broken, crushed, bruised, oppressed, in short troubles]
 - a) A difficult conception, after 20 years, sending them to God. Divine grace evident in it (21) [cf. 26]
 - b) Struggle in womb sent Rebekah to God—Twins = 2 nations: *People over people shall prevail, the elder the younger's slave.*
 - c) **Gospel plan of Redemption**—reference Genesis 3:15. Not according to man or man's tradition...

2. Struggle in birth (25:24-26) [Struggling to be first-born. Sibling rivalry?]
 - a) Esau came first (name means *hairy*)
 - b) Jacob: *one who supplants, who holds on, who needs protection, heel-grabber*: amiable, pious, cultured.
 - c) **In God's plan, the helpless is lifted up.** But is Jacob's tenacity not evident also?

3. Struggle for the love of his parents (25:27-28)
 - a) Esau a *knowing* hunter, a “man of the field, a “man's man” —loved by his father Isaac. [*cunning*]
 - b) Jacob a man of peace, (*complete, plain, upright* (e.g. Job), *sound, ordinary, handsome*), a homebody (*dwelling*) “tent dweller” in contrast to man of fields, liked to cook—loved by his mother Rebekah. [*plain man, sitting in tents*]
 - c) **God loves all His children.**

4. Struggle with his brother for the birthright (25:29-34)
 - a) Significance of birthright: Greater responsibility, double inheritance, authority.
 - b) Esau despised his rights and responsibilities. Jacob deceived him, clever, but underhanded.
 - Could the birthright be sold, denied, or transferred? (e.g. Reuben, but Jacob's deal probably secret.)
 - Lentil stew: onions, garlic, rice, olive oil served with lamb. “Red stuff!” Edom.
 - c) **Ends don't justify the means.** 2 Tim. 2:5 ...*compete according to the rules*

5. Struggle for his father's blessing (chap. 27)
 - a) Significance of the father's blessing: the formal transfer of birthright.
 - b) Jacob gained Isaac's blessing by deceit bringing about a life of unhappiness.
 - c) He received the blessing, but do ENDS JUSTIFY MEANS?
 - d) He received the blessing despite his unworthiness—**God's will done despite human frailty. As much as we want God's blessing, it does not come by our efforts but by His grace.**

Conclusion: What do we make of Jacob—that the Lord helps those who help themselves? Did he help or hinder God's plan to bless him? Clearly, his efforts made things worse. Note the promises:

- a) God has declared a division and provided a Redeemer (25:23)
- b) God has put His blessing on Jacob's Descendent and all who descend from Him by faith.

What lesson for us? Our efforts to grasp God's blessings for ourselves will create havoc. God's grace prevails. His love not only makes the impossible possible, but He brings His blessings despite our failures. Whatever conflicts from our upbringing, whatever mistakes we have made, He will bring about all His promised blessings to us, as we entrust ourselves to Him in Christ.