

# Unfinished Business

Title: Part 2 – Putting the Past Behind You

Date: March 3, 2024

Transition: Band Continues Softly

As we continue in this moment of worship I want to pause and ask God to prepare us for what He wants to show us today. Last week we said **unfinished business in the past never remains in the past**. But the truth is we keep our hearts so distracted these days that often we don't know if we are reacting the way we are because of something we are dealing with now, or if this is some unfinished business from the past coming back up in our present.

So, before we go any further let's pause and ask our gracious Heavenly Father to calm our anxious hearts and speak His truth to each of us so that we can leave here differently than when we came in. Will you pray with me?

## [PRAYER TIME]

Hey before you grab a seat find 4 people and tell them "It's no accident you showed up today." Do that and then grab a seat. Thank you worship team. We believe it's no accident that you are joining us on our app or social channels. We hope you can stick around until the end and as always, let us know if we can pray for you or serve you.

Well, we are in the second part of a message we began last Sunday called "Unfinished Business." If you weren't here last week, I would encourage you to go back and watch that message on our app or website. There are some things we covered in that, that are important for your understanding of where we are headed today. Today, we're taking a deeper dive into this idea that all of us have some Unfinished Business from the past, that if not dealt with, will continue to impact and shape our future. AND usually in the most unexpected or inopportune ways.

To do this we are going to look at a familiar story from the Old Testament of the Bible, but I think we will look at it in a way that you've never considered. The truth is the heroes of the faith didn't always get it right in their personal life or their family life or with the things they struggled with. AND that is the case with today's story from **Genesis 27**. In Genesis 27 we find the story of two boys who were deeply wounded by their father, their names? Jacob and Esau. Let's begin with the words of Esau. Genesis 27, beginning in verse 38. He cries out:

**Esau said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!"**

**Then Esau wept aloud.**

We obviously are walking into a pivotal moment, and I'll explain it more, but here is the reality. There's not enough anguish in the human vocabulary to properly communicate what Esau was feeling here. This is a cry that comes from deep within his soul. This is primal. This is the ache of a son who desperately wants to have his father's blessing.

BUT what led to this cry? We'll talk about that in a few minutes. But what was true of Esau was also true of his brother Jacob. And it also happens to be true for each and every one of us. Humans hunger to be blessed. We want it from our parents. We want it from our friends and spouses. We most of all want it and need it from God. Everybody longs to be blessed. Everyone wants to know that they matter. Everyone wants to be known and loved at the deepest level. AND when that doesn't happen, it launches us into life with a deep ache in our soul that we will attempt to fill in any way we can.

The cry for a blessing can still be heard today. For example, Ted Turner, he's a multibillionaire, he's the one that brought us CNN and 24-hour cable news, TBS and TNT. He also owned the Braves and Atlanta Hawks,

and He is an international yachtsman competing in the America's Cup numerous times. But there's something deep in Ted Turner that feels unblessed. He once told a very revealing story about himself. One day he went out all alone in his boat, well beyond the site of land. He dropped the anchor and he just sat there for some time. He was thinking about his success, all the time, all the money, all the effort he'd put into it, he got to thinking about what he was trying to prove and who he had been trying to prove it to. Finally, he stood up on the deck, looked out at some distant point where the sea and the sky meet and cried out to his dead Father:

### **"Is this good enough?" – Ted Turner**

Can you hear the cry for blessing in his words? That describes a lot of us if we are honest! At the top of the list of secrets we keep is that we secretly yearn for our father's love and approval. BUT regardless of whether or not your story is like Ted Turner's or Jacob and Esau's, I want you to hear this one thing loud and clear today. God stands ready to bless you, and that's what we really need! Amen! God is the good, good Father you may have never had but longed for and He can meet you in your place of woundedness if you will let Him!

But to understand the story of Jacob and Esau we have to understand dysfunctional family systems and the forces that shape us. In this story of two brothers, we learn that Esau is the strong one. Jacob is the weak one. Esau's the outdoorsman. Jacob is the homebody. Esau is daddy's boy and Jacob, he's a momma's boy. In fact, the book of Genesis gives us almost more than we care to know about Jacob's family, and it's not pretty. The Bible says Isaac loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob. In other words, they put the "fun" in dysfunctional! So, Esau doesn't feel love from mom and Jacob doesn't feel love from dad.

A psychiatrist, **Naomi Rosenblatt** has written a lot about the family dynamics in the Book of Genesis, and she makes this interesting observation, she says:

**"...the parents had lost affection for one another, so each had chosen one of their children through whom their primary emotional needs are being met. Each child may benefit in the short run from the intense devotion of a single parent. But this new surrogate marriage between parent and child is fundamentally unequal and frustrating for the child, who needs the balance of both male and female role models."**

Can anyone say "ewe..." Bottom line, this is a very unhealthy home, and it sets up the boys to spend their life searching for what has been denied them. Jacob is a man seeking his father's blessing. Esau feels unblessed by his mother, so he actually becomes a womanizer.

In fact, this family is the portrait of a dysfunctional family. They have all five symptoms as we are going to see. We will move too quick to write these down, but I want you to see them so you can identify them as this story unfolds. The first is: *{SEE IF THEY WILL FIT ON ONE SLIDE}*

**1. Estrangement – family members who avoid each other.**

**2. Anger – expressed or repressed.**

**3. Lack of Trust – seen in faulty patterns of communication.**

**4. Deception – the inability to speak truth to other family members.**

## 5. Unhealthy Secrecy - the refusal to face the truth.

If you were to lay this template of a dysfunctional family over the story of Jacob and Esau, it's a perfect fit. This is a Biblical family that's not working well at all! None of them come off looking good. **The other thing** that is glaring in the text is that these four family members never appear together at the same time. That's also not good. It's a portrait of a family who's hanging by a thread.

SO, here's where our story begins. Jacob knew his brother's struggle with impulsive decision making, and Jacob knew how to exploit that impulsiveness to his advantage. One day, Esau came in from a long exhausting hunt while Jacob was cooking a stew. When Esau smelled the stew, he said, "I want some of that and I want it right now!" Jacob's first response, "Sell me your birthright..." So, Esau is starving, and Jacob decides to exploit that hunger to his advantage. This is like standing on a rescue boat with a life preserver and telling a drowning, man, "I'll throw this to you for a \$100,000... and I don't take Venmo."

Esau is literally dying of hunger though, so he agrees and turns over or sells his birthright. The birthright was all about who gets the stuff when dad dies, who gets the farm, the fields, the sheep, the oxygen, all the stuff in the barn, that kind of thing. So, Jacob manipulates his brother into surrendering that, but that's not all. He also wants Esau's blessing.

Now, a blessing was a pronouncement of acceptance, but it was also a prediction of a favorable future. It was like saying, "These are all the fruits of my life that I've worked hard to achieve. These are the gifts and the graces and the virtues and the lessons that I've taken a lifetime to learn, and I pass them on to you. Now they're all yours." Jacob wanted this because he was the second born of the two brothers. Cultural norms of this day said the birthright and the blessing exclusively belonged to the older brother Esau.

But Isaac, their father is old. He's near death. His eyesight is all but gone. So, Isaac asked his oldest boy Esau to go hunt for him, fix him his favorite meal, and after that, he would give his blessing to Esau. BUT Isaac's wife hears this conversation, and she concocts this scheme for her younger son, her favorite, to dupe dear old dad into giving him the blessing instead of Esau.

Here's what happened. Genesis 27, this is Jacob's mom, she says to him: (v.8-10)

**"Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: 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. Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies."**

Jacob's like, "You know, that just might work, but I'm smooth skinned and Esau is a hairy dude, what if dad wants to touch me? Then he will curse me instead of blessing me!" Mom's thought of everything though, skip down to verse 15: (v.15-17, 24-27)

**Then Rebekah took the best clothes of Esau her older son, which she had in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob. She also covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goatskins. Then she handed to her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made.** [So, Jacob goes in to meet Isaac. Skip down to verse 24] **"Are you really my son Esau?" he asked. "I am," he replied. 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. Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come here, my son, and kiss me." So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him.**

Now, Isaac doesn't realize what's taken place until his older son Esau returns from the hunt with the catch of the day that he cooked for his father. But by then, it's too late. What's been done cannot be undone. That's when we hear Esau crying out to his father to give him some kind of blessing.

Well, needless to say, this act of deception leads to bad blood between the brothers. Esau is so angry he wants to kill his brother. In fact, Isaac and Rebekah have to send Jacob away secretly to live with his uncle for his own safety!

BUT here's the ultimate irony in the story. Even though Jacob has the birthright and the blessing, he's now exiled from his family. He's forced to build a new life for himself miles away from home. For 20 years he lives cut off from his parents, their wealth, their servants, and their land. Even though the birthright and blessing are his, he lives without any of the benefits of them! AND because of this mess he created, Jacob isn't home when his mother dies.

AND on top of all of that, even though Jacob had received his father's blessing, he knew it wasn't really his. As a result, he went through much of his adult life continuing in this pattern of deception and scheming in order to get his way. WHY? Because he's still a man in search of a blessing.

I wrote this in my notes:

## **The approval that we get through manipulation never satisfies.**

It doesn't even come close to touching the ache because we know how we got it. When you sell your soul to be liked, when you manipulate others to try to get them to say nice things to you or about you, it never feels like enough because it isn't. What we really crave is for people to do this of their own accord. Do it because they want to do it, because we matter so much to them. If we get affirmation any other way, it has no staying power in our life. It won't fill the empty place in your soul. What is needed is to be loved, not for your performance, not for your abilities, not for your contribution. But simply being loved for who we are.

SO, why does any of this matter? I mean a blessing. It's just words. Who cares if you got them or didn't? Well, in case you haven't figured this out yet, words matter! They matter so much that many of you still cling to them even years after they were spoken. Negative words, positive words, we hold onto them. Some of you can not only remember the words that were said to you, but the expression on the person's face, their tone of voice, the sense of embarrassment or anger you felt in that moment, everything. In fact, me saying this right now puts you back there in that moment. So, don't tell me that words don't matter.

Esau doesn't get to hear the words intended to bless his life, and he breaks down in bitter anguish. And even though Jacob does get to hear the words of blessing, in his heart of hearts, he knows those words were not meant for him. Both boys are still in search of a blessing.

**AND** feeling unblessed sets us up to become approval addicts. An approval addict has an exaggerated need for validation from others in order to feel significant.

Think about it like this. Whenever you get a bump on your head or say a bruise on your arm, there tends to be swelling around that injury, right? The same thing happens with wounds to the soul. When you get wounded, like in the area of acceptance, it becomes a swollen need in your life. It's an area of your life that becomes hypersensitized. The slightest bump in that area gets big reactions out of you. It's an exaggerated, swollen, aching need for relief.

AND this leads people into doing all kinds of crazy things just to feel accepted. That's what Jacob does because he grew up without the acceptance of his father. That wounding set him up to spend his life searching for what he'd been denied. On the other hand, Esau gets tricked out of his blessing. So, he

becomes consumed with thoughts of hate and thoughts of revenge for losing out on what he thought should have been his. Now both brothers have holes in their souls, both crave a blessing that they didn't get.

So, all this dysfunction and pain goes on for a couple decades. But then we come to the night that changed everything for Jacob. I title this under **the blessing we really need**. The Bible describes this episode like this in Genesis 32: (v.22)

**That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.**

The Jabbok is a small river, but it is not just a geographical marker to let us know the setting for this story. The word Jabbok literally means **the place of emptying**.

So, get this. After years of emotional and physical distance, Jacob was finally on his way to meet his brother. After safely transporting his family across the Jabbok, Jacob is tackled by a stranger out of the dark who's determined to wrestle with him. The Bible makes clear that this stranger was none other than God Himself in human form. They call this a Christophany, which is an Old Testament appearance of Jesus and there are several of these recorded.

So, 20 years have passed, and Jacob is on his way to see his brother for the first time since cheating him out of the blessing when Jacob is wrestled to the ground by this stranger. Here's how the Bible describes it: (Genesis 32:24-26)

**So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you [What? What does he say?] bless me."**

Here's why I love the fact that Scripture says they wrestled. Any high school or college wrestlers in the house? See wrestling is not so much a matter of overwhelming an opponent with superior strength as it is a matter of stealth, of keeping an opponent off balance by using their own strength against them. It's a matter of tricking an opponent, making them think that you're going to do one thing and then doing something entirely different. Manipulation and deception are the essence of wrestling. And remember, that's Jacob's strong suit! It's literally what his name means! Jacob: trickster, deceiver, manipulator. He knows how to make you think He's doing one thing only to do something totally unexpected.

So, what's really happening here is God is about to be beat Jacob at his own game. AND that's central to our understanding of this story. Jacob, his craftiness, his power, his ingenuity, it all had to be broken just as it has to be broken in our lives.

See, catch this. Notice this detail in the scripture we just read. It says, put it back up:

**So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.**

This wrestling match between Jacob and God goes on for hours. Jacob has resisted, struggled, and fought as hard as he could. He refused to give up. Finally, God touches Jacob on the thigh, on his hip, which is totally wrenched out of socket. The question is WHY? Why does God dislocate Jacob's hip?

Here's why. Every single throw that a wrestler uses is a throw that centers around one pivot—the pivot of his thigh. If you wanna destroy the power of a wrestler, you injure his thigh and he's finished. AND that's what God does. All Jacob can do now is just helplessly cling in dependence on his opponent. BUT that's exactly where God wants him to be. Write this down:

**You can't get the blessing of God through manipulation. You only get God's blessings when you cling to Him in helpless dependence.**

In other words, God has to break us down at the strongest part of our self-life before He can fully bless us. Jacob had to be broken in the strong place of his life. At the place where Jacob always depends on Jacob.

See, consider this, Jacob was not wrestling with God to obtain the blessing. God was wrestling with Jacob to give the blessing! The goal of a wrestler is to bring his opponent down, to pin him to the ground, to render him helpless, and that's exactly what God does to Jacob here. He wrestled with Jacob to pin him down, to conquer his spirit, to subdue his flesh, to render him helpless.

The point of this story is not that I have to wrestle with God for Him to bless me. It's actually the opposite. It's only when we can't wrestle with Him anymore, it's only when you're done wrestling, it's only after you've given up on your games, when you know that you're helpless and vulnerable, it's only after that that you and I can be blessed. Once you give up on your schemes to somehow earn or deserve the blessing, then and only then can you be blessed. It's in losing that we win!

The truth is all Jacob ever wanted was for his dad to hug him and love him like his older brother. Time and time again, he was brushed aside, belittled, and ignored with tears. He'd walk away starving for his father's love and affection. But that affirmation, affection and approval was never there in his father's eyes. This launched Jacob into life with a lust for approval. He wrestled with Esau for the blessing. He'd wrestled with his dad for the blessing. He wrestled with his trickster of an uncle for the blessing. AND every time he comes up short.

BUT when this wrestling match with God was finally over, Jacob knew something he'd never known before. He knows that God knows him through and through and loves him anyway!

AND hear me church, that's the single most revolutionary discovery any human being can ever make. That God knows all of our Jacobness, and yet He loves us anyway! God sees you as you actually are and loves you! No strings attached! God sees through your coverup, through your manipulations, and He loves you anyway! He takes you as you are, and He loves you as you are! Come on church, praise Him if you are thankful for that today! Praise Him if you are grateful for the never-ending love of God!

This story today is the story of Jacob, but I wonder how many of you is this your story as well. All you wanted from your dad growing up was to hear and know that he loved you no matter what. All you wanted was to hear him say you don't have to do anything for me to love you. And because you didn't get that, many of you did what Jacob did. You have gone through your life with an ache in your soul to be noticed and to be loved, wrestling with anybody and everybody to get it. It is the cry of your wounded heart. Please notice me, make me feel special, help me know I'm loved!

And I know I am treading on some tender ground here, but that way of living has to be broken. For you to be blessed, it has to be broken. It has to be broken because, like Jacob, you are probably good at it. You are really good at manipulating people into giving back to you the illusion of love. **BUT what God wants to do is to give you a new name and a new acceptance.**

We see this in the story of Jacob as he wrestles with God, look at this: (Gen 32:27-28)

The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

When God asks, "What's your name?" He's not asking, what name did your mother and father give you? God already knows that. He's asking, what sort of person are you? What drives your life? Why do you do what you do? Jacob confesses my name, my character, is Jacob. Which means I'm a cheat. I'm the one who tries to take someone else's place. I'm the one who seeks to gain advantage by whatever means I can, even if it means telling lies or stealing from my own brother.

This is so key though. I wrote this in my notes:

## **Real change means coming to terms with who I've become.**

Right? Real change means coming to terms with who I've become. Change begins with honesty about ourselves. We have to get real. We have to stop presenting little fictions about ourselves and others and start living the truth.

SO, are you like Jacob? Is your life one constant attempt to get your needs met by whatever means necessary? Have you ever considered that maybe what you're doing is not really loving others, but using others to get your own needs met because your love wasn't freely given in the first place. It had an unstated price tag. If I do this, I expect this in return. The more we engage in these self-defeating behaviors, the more distant love becomes.

BUT here is what I think is so cool. After this incident, God continues to reveal Himself as the God of Jacob. Why not the God of Israel, right? But instead, God says many times in the Bible, "I'm the God of Jacob." Here's why I think that is so cool. It's because God is the God of wounded souls. He's the God of every Jacob who knows they're a Jacob and are tired of trying to earn what God only gives by grace.

So, God says, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel!" Which means God contends or literally it means God's people! Jacob has a new name and a new acceptance which enables him to do this. Jacob returns the blessing. Notice how this story wraps up: (Gen 32:13-18)

From what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, "Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds." He instructed the one in the lead: "When my brother Esau meets you and asks, 'Who do you belong to, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?' then you are to say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us.'"

These brothers who've been estranged for 20 years are finally about to meet so Jacob sends all these herds and gifts on ahead. And at first glance this seems like one more way that Jacob was being Jacob, that he was trying to bribe his brother or manipulate him for a desirable outcome. BUT what if this wrestling match with God did fundamentally change Jacob? That Jacob finally knew what it meant to be blessed, not a blessing he stole, but a blessing given to him by God himself. What if these weren't a bribe or a manipulation, what if this was actually Jacob returning Esau's birthright, with interest!

So, Jacob sees his brother and 400 armed men coming toward him so Jacob walks out alone and bows down seven times before Esau. It was that culture's way of saying; I want everyone watching to know that I am your servant, and you are my master. I submit to you. Jacob is giving back the blessing he stole from Esau. Remember what dad had told to Jacob? He said: (Gen 27:29)

**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.**

The blessing Jacob stole said that Esau would one day bow down to him, but now Jacob is reversing it! This is Jacob's way of saying; I give you back the blessing that I owe to you. This is repentance, it's restitution. It's setting things right the way they were intended to be.

Jacob had thought that stealing that blessing would give him happiness and power and security. But now he knows that he doesn't need Esau's blessing to get any of those things. God would give him all those things!

AND I'm here to tell you the same thing. It doesn't matter what your parents did or didn't do! It doesn't matter what that teacher or coach or pastor did or didn't do! It doesn't matter what that ex-spouse did or didn't do! It doesn't matter what that boss did or didn't do! Ultimately, that doesn't have the power to determine who you are! God, and God alone has the power to bless you in the way that you most crave to be blessed! The real blessing doesn't come from mom or from dad. It comes from our Heavenly Father and there is nothing we can do to earn it or deserve it! Aren't you glad?

You can read this for yourself. It's found in John 17. Jesus prayed that you and I might finally and fully realize this about God. That we're all loved in the same way, and to the same degree, that He is loved! That God loves you as much, and in the same way, as He loves His son Jesus. Meaning you and I stand in exactly the same relationship to God as Jesus. You're loved in precisely the same way, not one fraction of a difference.

What I'm telling you is, long before your father or mother, your brothers or sisters, your teachers, your church, or anybody else said something to you that was very wounding. Long before you were rejected by somebody that you cared about deeply. That Voice has always been there telling you, "I love you with an everlasting love. I love you just the way you are. I love you in your Jacobness. There's nothing you can do, could do, or will do, that will make Me love you any more or any less."

Hear me today, this is where our healing begins. This is the kind of love that can heal your soul. The only question is, will you let it?

Let's pray.