

**“Using Sin, Sinlessly”**  
**Genesis 25: 19-34**

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When I was a kid, for a while my parents had a pool in the back yard. The pool had a hot tub attached to it - built into the pool and sharing its plumbing system. Their way of heating the hot tub was to go back to the pool pumps and do two important things—switch the flow of water from the pool to the hot tub, and turn on the heater. That way, water would flow into the hot tub and that water would be hot, so the hot tub would heat up nicely.

One evening in early high school, I had a couple of friends over and we wanted to enjoy the hot tub. So I switched the flow of water and I turned on the heater and we had a great time. Of course, in order to restore the pool to proper function, when you are finished using the hot tub, you must reverse what you’ve done before—turn off the heater and switch back the water flow to the pool. And herein lied my error. I remembered to switch the water flow back but I *forgot* to turn off the heater. That meant that all the water that was flowing into the pool was being heated. Did I mention that it stayed that way for about 15 hours? Did I mention that we lived in San Antonio? Did I mention that it was August? When the rest of the family went to take a nice cool dip in the pool the next afternoon, they were greeted with an enormous hot tub! The entire pool had been heated. Needless to say, they were not happy. My mistake had led to a very poor outcome. It had really ruined all the plans for a nice summer afternoon in the pool.

I tell this to illustrate the fact that much of our lives work this way. Our actions lead to particular consequences. This is the way the world works. We make choices and those choices affect later outcomes, sometimes vastly changing the direction of things. Actions have consequences. But what happens to God’s eternal plans when we act outside of what he has revealed to be good and right? What happens to God’s eternal plan of redemption when we mess up our part? When a husband and wife divorce, how does that affect God’s eternal plan to redeem his creation? Is that plan derailed? When a student fails out of college, what does that do to God’s

eternal decrees? Are his eternal plans changeable according to our actions? If we're good, do they continue and, if we're bad, do they fall apart?

Furthermore, how do we affirm real consequences for our actions and the actions of others and still believe that God is in control? At the end of the day, who is driving the ship? These are actually the questions that we are going to wrestle with today and for the weeks to come. In many ways, this last half of Genesis deals with this question: ***are the promises of God going to be fulfilled or are the often times terrible actions of his people going to bring them to naught?***

Let's do a little catching up on the story so far. We took a long break, so you may have forgotten what has happened in Genesis so far. In the beginning, the Bible tells us, God created everything. And that everything was good. Part of that good creation was humankind, created to reflect the image of God throughout the world, to rule perfectly and lovingly, to care for God's creation and for each other, and live in a harmonious, worshipping relationship with God. But that goodness changed when mankind chose to find fulfillment in their own desires rather than in God's. Sin—or the idea of a life lived without reference to God—entered the world. From that point on, two major things came into play. First, the consequences of sin became a reality. Death. Strife. Discord. Pain and Suffering. The good world that God had made was broken, and it affected everything. But secondly, God, in his mercy, set out to change that new reality. To renew what had been broken. To redeem his people. To save the world that had rebelled against him, and to do it at great cost to himself. And from this time on, what we see in the book of Genesis (and throughout the Bible) are these two themes at play: 1) sin has consequences and they are great, but 2) God's plan of redemption will continue in spite of those consequences.

Early in Genesis, we see the consequences of sin grew so great that the earth is destroyed by flood and only Noah and his family are saved. But we see in this also that second principle—the continuing of God's redemptive plan through the line of Noah. Then, in chapter 12, we are introduced to Abraham, the man through whom that line of promised redemption will continue. Through the family of Abraham and ultimately through his descendant Jesus Christ, God will work the process of redemption and renewal. We traced that story up through Abraham and his son Isaac and now we find that Isaac is old and he has two sons. And as we come up to

this story, we are faced with this question: *are the promises of God going to be fulfilled or are the often times terrible actions of his people going to bring them to naught?* Is God going to continue his promise to redeem and to work through Abraham's family, or are the actions of those people going to derail God's plan? How do the consequences for sin and God's eternal plan of redemption go together?

Let's look more closely at this story. You may have noticed some repeated words as we read this story. In fact, one probably stuck out the most. Blessing. The word for **blessing** in Hebrew—Barak—shows up 22 times in this passage! It's used in form of a verb and in noun form and it's all over the story. It is connected to a previous story that we didn't read. In Genesis 25, we read the familiar story of Joseph and Esau and the ordeal of the birthright. The story goes like this: Esau, who is a hunter, is out all day hunting and he comes home famished. Jacob, who is more of an inside guy, has been cooking lentil stew and it looks and smells delicious. And Esau, when he comes in, wants that stew so badly that he's willing to give anything for it. Knowing this, Jacob takes advantage of his brother and sells him some stew in exchange for Esau's birthright. The birthright is what the eldest son had and it was very important. It meant that, as the eldest, you got a double portion of the father's inheritance. If there were 9 brothers, the oldest would get 2 portions of that nine and the other 8 would split the seven remaining portions. If there were only two brothers, the oldest would get all of it. Remember, Jacob and Esau are twins, but Esau was born first so he is entitled to the entire inheritance. Except that he's just given away that right. This was foretold, actually, to Rebekah, their mother, as she received a prophecy when the twins were born, that the older would serve the younger. And Esau has now unknowingly confirmed that prophecy.

And now, as we come to this story, we find Esau at the end of his father's life, asking for blessing. That blessing is tied tightly to the birthright—they are supposed to go hand in hand. Both Esau and Isaac (who favors Esau) are going against what had been done earlier, and still pushing forward for blessing and inheritance for Esau. Furthermore, because this is God's chosen family - the family of Abraham - the blessing and the line of inheritance is tied to the blessing that God has given Abraham and his family—to be the promised line of redemption for the world.

So who will get to be the one who carries on this line of promise, this line of blessing? Who is worthy to receive it? Let's line them up and take a look. First, let's look at Jacob. He already is supposed to have the birthright, so maybe he's the worthy recipient. But the way he got the birthright is shady and manipulative at best. And the way he's gone about treating his father here is downright despicable. He's deceived his father, who is old and blind. He lies to him at least 3 times. He invokes the Lord's name blasphemously in verse 20, saying that the reason he has brought the meat so quickly is that the Lord gave him success. He goes to great lengths to continue in his ruse with his father, even putting on his brother's clothes and putting goat hair on his body so he feels like Esau. The picture we see of Jacob is one of a person worthy of a curse, not blessing!

Maybe Esau is more deserving. It would seem, from this story like Esau is simply the innocent victim. But if you trace backward, you find that not only did Esau act foolishly in selling his birthright (the Bible says that Esau "despised" his birthright), but that he's also acted outside of his parents desires and married not one but TWO Canaanite women. As we end the passage we read today, we find Esau burning with anger, plotting to kill his brother much like Cain killed Abel. The picture we see of Esau is not much better than the one we see of Jacob.

And are the parents really any better? A father who favors one son over the other, overlooks the Lord's clear words to his wife about which son should receive prominence, seems to be driven by his love for food, and pushes forward with blessing a son who has already sold his birthright. Or what about Rebekah? The mother who pits one son against another—the driving force behind the intricate web of deception that happens here? The picture we see of the parents is just as bad as the one we see of the sons. In fact, this entire scene is a picture not of blessing but of the need for redemption! It's a picture of a very broken family, torn apart by favoritism, foolishness and deception. It's a picture of the consequences of sin at work in the world and the need for God to do something about it. If you've ever read a Flannery O'Connor story, this is what it's like—twisted and grotesque characters who are crying out for redemption. It's a picture with words spray-painted in large red letters, "WE NEED HELP!"

But have you ever seen one of those pictures that looks different when you see it from another angle? It's an old woman with a shawl from one angle but it's also a picture of a young, beautiful woman from a different angle. Well, that's what's going on here. Because while this is a picture of the consequences of sin and the need for redemption, it's also a picture of God's plan of redemption. This twisted and broken family with so much deception and frustration is the family that will bring about the line of Jesus Christ. And guess what? It doesn't get a lot better. Jacob grows up to play favorites just like his dad. His sons contemplate murdering their brother and then instead sell him to slave traders. Those brothers end up wiping out an entire city out of anger. There's conflict and deception and sin all over. This is the family that grows into the nation of Israel, God's chosen means of bringing redemption to the world. And that nation strays from God over and over. Her kings, even the good ones, fall into sin continually. This is the line that is traced to Jesus. This is the line of promise that was hinted at in Genesis 3 and ends in Christ. These are the people that God uses to bring his redemption to the world. But it's full of deception. It's full of sin. Can God really work with that? ***Are the promises of God going to be fulfilled even through people like this or are the terrible actions of his people going to bring those promises to naught?*** Can God really work this way? Can we really believe that there are real consequences for sin and still believe that God's eternal purposes will remain?

Yes. I have a friend who taught me this phrase: *God uses sin, sinlessly*. God, in his infinite mercy and wisdom and power, uses even the brokenness of this world to work his plan of renewal. And he uses the broken people of this world to do it. God uses sin, sinlessly. It's the way in which we have been saved. Judas betrayed Jesus—sin. The Jewish rulers put him on trial falsely and he was misrepresented—that's sin. The perfect man was crucified and falsely put to death—sin. The sin of man brought about the death of Jesus, God's only son. It was the most heinous crime ever committed. But it was also what God used to enact the most loving and merciful plan ever conceived. That Jesus would sacrifice himself for us. That he without sin would die our death in order to forgive us. That's God using sin, sinlessly.

Let's make it even more personal. What about our sin? What about the choices I make? What about my foolishness with my money? What about my addictions? What about my sexual promiscuity or my pornography usage? And what about the

sin that has been committed against me? The abuse or the abandonment or the hatred? Is God using that? And how do the consequences for sin play a part?

I want to leave you with 3 takeaways. Three things to keep in mind as we try and put these two big things—our responsibility and God’s sovereign plan—together...

1. Don’t call bad things good. We can still call a spade a spade. The Bible is plain about sin, and just because God is able to use even the sin in this world to work his plan of redemption, that doesn’t mean it’s not sin. Our actions still have consequences, and they will affect us in this life. And if you’re a Christian, you are called to live in response to the love that has been shown to you in Christ. Your actions don’t make you who you are (Jesus does that), but *because of who you are* your actions change.

2. The sin in the world around you is not evidence that God is no longer in control. This world is full of horror and it feels like it gets bigger every day. We have much more access to view the sin around us today and it can feel overwhelming. War. Torture. Terrorism. Even the sin that has been committed against you. Many of you have been wronged deeply. We can call it what it is. But the brokenness of the world is not evidence that God is no longer in control. God is using sin sinlessly, even now. He is continuing to be at work blessing this world and enacting his plan of redemption.

3. The sin in your own life matters to God, but it does not derail his plan of blessing. If you have some sort of large sin or sin pattern in your life, it can be tempting to believe that you are outside of God’s redemptive reach. That your sin is too big. But that is not the way the Bible presents sin or the way it presents forgiveness. There is no one so good they don’t need the forgiveness of Jesus Christ and no one so bad they can’t receive it. Jesus, the only son of the father, instead of manipulating his way to blessing, gave up that blessing to give it to us. The father who sees everything—who is not blind to our sin—has chosen to bless us even in the midst of that sinful state. To place our sin on his only son so that we might receive his righteousness. And there is no one who doesn’t need this forgiveness and there is no one who cannot receive it.

Furthermore, the Lord has not lost control of your life if you've made a bad decision. Will you feel a consequence for that? Maybe. But take hope in the Lord's ability to take even what is broken and make it beautiful in you. To use your sin and your foolishness to weave together a life of blessing. Our decisions do not derail God's redemptive plans. That should be a comfort to us.

If God can work through this family, He can take even your sin and use it to work blessing in your life and in the world.