

Midweek Meditation, October 28, 2020 for the week of October 25

Genesis 25

You may remember, last week, we recognized the death of Abraham, and sort of reviewed and memorialized the life, and the journey of the father of our faith. We then touched, briefly, on the descendants of Ishmael. And today, we embark on the next portion of this family's journey that was heir to God's promise, that Abraham, Isaac, and their descendants would be God's chosen people. We are told at the very beginning of our passage that Isaac is 40 years old at the point when Rebekah and Abraham's servant arrive from Abraham's homeland, and then, Rebekah and Isaac are married. Interestingly enough, it turns out that Rebekah had the same problem that Sarah had, when it came to giving birth to the child that would continue the line of God's chosen people. She was barren. And we will find out that the next generation of God's chosen people, Jacob and Rachel have the same problem. Perhaps that is God's providence, that each of the first three generations of God's chosen people would be born of somewhat miraculous circumstances. Perhaps that would help people believe, that the answer to the question that God asked Abraham and Sarah was, "No, there is nothing that is too hard for God". You may remember all of the struggle and doubt and confusion and hardship that, Sarah not being able to give birth, created for Abraham and Sarah.

Well, we pick up this story with Isaac and Rebekah basically facing the same circumstances. And interestingly enough, Isaac seems to be handling this stressful situation a little bit more faithfully than Abraham and Sarah ever did. Unlike Abraham and Sarah, who tried to come up with their own solution to the problem, Isaac simply came before the Lord in prayer. And so, after 20 years of not being able to have a child, Isaac's prayer was answered. And we know it was 20 years, because our scripture says that Isaac was 40 when he was married, and 60 at the time when Rebekah gives birth. Isaac's prayer must have been a good one, because when the blessed day of birth came along, Rebekah gave birth to twins, Esau and Jacob. The Scripture tells about Rebekah's pregnancy, and then the Lord had a couple of important things to say to Rebekah about this birth that was to come. He said to her two nations are in your womb, and two people from within you will be separated: One of them will be stronger than the other, and the older one will serve the younger. We will find out later in Genesis, that both of these points will have important meaning in this family's journey. One of these twins, Esau, the first born, will be the seed of the nation Edom and the Edomite people, and the other, Jacob, will be the seed of Israel, the chosen people of God, thus, the two nations. At this point, God is telling Rebekah that Jacob, the one born second, was to be the one to continue the line of God's chosen people. And Rebekah, no doubt, kept this truth in her heart for the rest of her life. Often, people who familiar with this story tend to raise an eyebrow when Rebekah and Jacob tricked Esau out of his birthright. And that is a story we will hear about next time. But I believe that whole story comes back to this moment when God tells Rebekah that the older one, Esau, will serve the younger, Jacob. Rebekah realizes that it is God's will that Jacob would receive the birthright of his father, and so she does what she does as an instrument of God's providence, rather than for her own personal agenda. There are also several things that this scripture says about this birth that are important. It is interesting, our passage notes that Esau and Jacob seemed to be battling even inside the womb of their mother, Rebekah. Verse 22 says, "The babies jostled each other within her," enough so, that she said to the Lord, "Why is this happening to me?" And that is when she was told about God's plan for Esau and Jacob. And this jostling that took place from before their birth was a trend that seemed to continue with them for their whole lives, and even the two nations of their heirs, the Edomites and the Israelites battled for many generations after Esau and Jacob were dead and buried.

Our passage describes Esau at the time of his birth. It says that he came from the womb red and his whole body was like a hairy garment. So, what do you name a baby who looks like this at the time of his birth? They

could have named him Hairy, I guess. Well, in fact, they did. The translation for the word Esau is Hairy. The Bible says of Jacob, that at the time of his birth, he was holding on to the heel of his brother. Maybe he was trying even at the time of their birth, to keep Esau from being the first born by holding on to his heel. As we will find out, later in life, Jacob will trick Esau out of his birthright. The name Jacob means “at the heel of,” owing to the fact that Jacob was holding onto Esau’s foot at the time of their birth. It seems that the name ascribed to Jacob as a “trickster” is given to him later in life. When the boys grew up, the words that God spoke to Rebekah at the time of their birth came true. Esau was a strong man who loved to hunt and be in the outdoors, and he was clearly Isaac’s favorite. In fact, it seems that part of the reason that Esau became a mighty hunter was to please his father’s taste for wild game. Jacob was more of a people person, perhaps a person better suited for leading God’s people. It says that Jacob was quiet probably contrasting him to Esau. And, it seems that Jacob was Rebekah’s favorite, perhaps owing to the fact that she remembered what God told her about Jacob, being the chosen one, many years ago. So, maybe it was more that Jacob was God’s favorite, as opposed to Rebekah’s favorite, although it could be both. It seems as though, as it had been with Abraham and Isaac, the people of Israel would come from only one offspring of Isaac not both. As Ishmael had been sent away, and became the seed of countries that would end up enemies of Israel, so too, Esau’s ancestors became the Edomites, who were also adversaries of Israel.

The story of Esau and Jacob goes on. There was an occasion when Jacob was cooking some stew. And his brother, Esau, came in from one of his hunting trips, and basically told Jacob that he was starving and that he wanted some of the stew that Jacob was cooking. And Jacob said, “You can have some of the stew, but first, give me your birthright.” Now, certainly, by now, Esau and Jacob both knew about God’s promise to the heirs of Abraham. I believe they both knew their birthright had to do not only with the blessing of their father Isaac, but that it had much more to do with blessing from God. And knowing that, Esau says very casually, “What do I care about birthright, right now I am so hungry that it doesn’t mean anything to me. Just give me some food.” But Jacob said, “If you want the stew, swear to me that you will give me your birthright.” So, Esau swore to Jacob his birthright, and then he had a tasty meal of bread and lentil stew. He ate and drank, and got up and left; and, probably never thought about it again. Now, as it turns out, that apparently isn’t the way deciding birthright worked. You can’t just trade it away for a bowl of stew. But the point that we should take from this passage is that Isaac’s blessing had to do with God’s blessing. Clearly God’s blessing was important to Jacob, or he would not have tried to bargain it away from his brother. Clearly God’s blessing was not important to Esau, because we see that he was willing to trade God’s blessing away for a dish of stew. Esau was a man dwelling in the presence of the world. His way was the way of the flesh. Jacob, on the other hand was living life in pursuit of God’s blessing. And that is the background that prepares us for the events that we are going to talk about next week. But what can we learn from the events of this passage? We learn that Isaac and Rebekah are sort of a transitional set of characters in this story. They play an important part, but not the main role. Isaac is only involved in a couple of main stories until the story transitions to Jacob. But Isaac and Rebekah are faithful to their part as supporting cast members. Rebekah leaves her family at a moment’s notice and moves to a desert so she can be the mother of Jacob, or the mother of Israel. Isaac waits patiently for the miracle of birth so that his part of the family history can be fulfilled. Just like not all people dare at the center of everything that happens within the ministry of our church. But just the same, all of our members are important. And God would grieve if one of you was missing. Next time we will talk about how the birthright of Isaac is passed on, how Isaac, at least in part, earned his eventual nickname, “Trickster.” Let us pray...