

Sermon for Sunday, September 21, 2025

Genesis 27:1-4, 15-23 & 28:10-18

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Jacob and Esau! Twin brothers born into a world in which the older brother always inherits the blessing. And let me be clear, this blessing is a very big deal: in the world and culture of the Old Testament this blessing is viewed as the passing on of rights, privilege, and responsibility to the next generation. The one who gets the blessing carries on the line of succession. There are several times when Jesus refers to God and calls him "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" and NOT "Abraham, Isaac, and Esau." We are so used to hearing that phrase that we don't even think about it much, but it points to something important: the idea that a younger son, Jacob, was granted the right of inheritance and succession.

Clearly, Jacob is an important character in the OT narrative. His story begins in Genesis 25:19 and continues through the end of chapter 36. Knowing this you can correctly assume that we heard only a very small part of the entire story in today's reading. Jacob acquired this all important blessing through deception and then runs away in fear for his life. Yes, Jacob the trickster, Jacob the one who participates in this deception with the assistance of his mother, runs because he is afraid. Now Jacob has a destination: he is going back to Haran, the city where Abraham lived for a time before he moved to the land of Canaan. It is also the city where Jacob's mother Rebekah grew up. But between Isaac & Rebekah's home in Beer Sheba and the city of Haran there is 500 miles of wilderness; unsettled land. Jacob is traveling alone and doing so was very risky. Not only are there wild animals; Esau's anger might motivate him to send out people to find Jacob and harm him. Jacob has good reason to be afraid.

How many of us have been forced into an unknown situation which causes us to be afraid? Sometimes we are forced to leave a beloved home because of a health challenge. Sometimes we have to make a job change because of the needs of one of our children. Sometimes a member of our family needs help and we have to make difficult (and perhaps unwelcome) decisions. I'm thinking that pretty much everyone of us has had some type of experience like this. That's part of what causes Jacob's fear.

The other reason why Jacob is afraid is because he is alone, utterly alone. That makes his situation even worse. We cannot necessarily grasp what Jacob is experiencing because most of us have someone that we can call upon to walk with us through the challenge. But Jacob is facing the unknown alone.

In the midst of Jacob's fear God makes a big and reassuring promise in verse 15. Genesis 28:15 "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." The power of Scripture is that we can appropriate the words God spoke to Jacob and hold them in our hearts, using them as encouragement for us in our personal situation.

Let's look at God's promise in more detail.

1. "I am with you." When the way looks dark, unknown, perhaps even dangerous, to know that God is with us certainly is an encouragement. We are not alone. Jesus' last words to his followers before he ascended to heaven were "I am with you always to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20) Wherever you find yourself my friends, God is with you.
2. Second phrase: "[I] will keep you wherever you go." When we find ourselves staying in a hospital room, or making frequent trips to Mayo for treatments, or dashing off to the Twin Cities because of the deep needs of a sibling or parent or child, it helps a great deal to remember that God has promised us (just as God promised Jacob) that God will keep us wherever we are. We are being cared for by God. Our needs are being monitored by God and God's Holy Spirit is moving among good people to bring you comfort and aid.
3. Then God says, "[I] will bring you back to this land." Jacob was on a long journey and leaving the promised land. It would be easy to think he might never come back. If so what happens to God's promise about giving this land to Abraham and his descendants? These words reassure Jacob that he will return. Returning home—that's what we all long to do. And a health challenge might make that really difficult. But there is one home that cannot be taken from us: our heavenly home. So let's stretch these words of God and claim that they are a promise that through God's power we will most certainly go to our heavenly home.
4. Finally, "I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Now, this is a promise God made to a very

specific person: to Jacob. It is a promise that is specific to Jacob's personal situation. Jacob is scared, he's fleeing into an unknown land and situation and it has the potential to be dangerous.

"I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." What is it that God has promised us? In our baptisms we are claimed by God forever. In our baptisms God promises that God will be with us; standing by our side until God has accomplished the promise. The ultimate promise is eternal life. A resurrected life after death. That's the promise. It's the "Today you will be with me in paradise" kind of promise that Jesus spoke to the thief hanging next to him on the cross. That's the kind of promise that we need when we face the challenges of life. We follow a God who is totally and completely committed to each and every one of us. "I will not leave you." That's the good news for today.

The sermon last week made a point about testing and provision. Sometimes God tests us, sometimes God allows us to be tested by outside forces. Abraham hung on in faith through the testing and through faith Abraham was witness to God's provision. The same is true for Jacob. His flight to Haran through the wilderness is a time of testing. If you were to read more of his story you would discover that even with a successful journey his testing isn't complete. Yet in the end Jacob was witness to God's provision.

We have a very long public prayer list. The folks on this list and their families are on a long journey like Jacob into the unknown. If you are not in that situation just now, give thanks. But I am reasonably confident that you have been on personal journeys like Jacob. To say nothing of the troubled time in which we are living. It's hard to listen to the news and tempting to avoid clicking on anything that comes across our feed because it's so awful; so hurtful. But we have the promises of God: I am with you, I will keep you wherever you go. I will not leave you until I have done/accomplished what I have promised you. These truths; these promises are what we must cling to as we go about our lives.

Romans 5:1-5 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not disappoint us,

because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.