

99-08-29b

Let's resume now our study in Genesis chapter 27 by way of some other Old Testament passages that record instances where deception took place. The question we ask ourselves is, where, if ever, is there a place for misleading or not fully communicating the truth? And as we have talked about even here today, there are all sorts of social mores and social customs that require us to say things we don't really mean. We tell a host or a hostess that we had a good time, regardless of whether we had a good time or not.

We compliment the food, even though it might not have been something that we enjoyed. And these are good things. We don't have to be brutally honest and say, you know, that has got to be the driest chicken I've ever eaten in my life.

Or, did you cook that rice before you put it in that dish? Or, did you read the recipe book and see that you're supposed to sauté the onions before you add them in? You know, they're just raw, they're hot. You know, we have elements of politeness. You know, your classic truism in America today is when a wife comes home with a new hairdo or a new dress or something and the husband says, oh dear, that's lovely.

And he may be startled by it or horrified by it or whatever. I, of course, don't do that. I've heard that people do that.

And it is a normal part of our culture. Your child creates something out of clay and you can't tell what it is, but you say, oh, that's just wonderful, that's lovely. There exists then a well-known level at which we say the kind thing or the polite thing rather than the true thing.

And that's normal. And if you were to push a woodenly literal interpretation of scripture that says don't ever say anything other than the truth, you would just have to be brutally honest and say, you know, that is the most unflattering thing I have ever seen. Or you come up to the pastor after the service and say, you know, that was great, Sam.

I didn't get a thing out of it. I totally don't understand. You left me dazed and confused.

I would have been better off if I had never even looked at that passage. Nobody has ever come up and said that, although I know that that is true. I know that at least every so often people come away just bum-foozled because I have massacred the preparation and treatment of a passage.

But, you know, people are gracious and kind and just wait for a more happy occasion when things come together in a better fashion. We all do that. So the fact that that exists tells us that there is a line somewhere between the beneficial and helpful dancing around the truth.

For example, here is one that may strike a little closer to home. What if you have wronged someone in your heart? What if you have committed a mental attitude sin of jealousy or bitterness or anger or lust? Well, you know, Jimmy Carter got on. What would he do? He was getting interviewed by some magazine and said, Oh, yes, I've looked around and I've lusted with these women in my heart.

We don't need to know that. Now, that's the truth. But I don't want to know that about him.

Or probably anybody else. And yet that's the truth. You know, is the truth always the best thing? No, it's not.

But the fact that there are occasions where the truth is not the best thing, where we don't, you know, this is a part of the exercise of the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit, to be patient and to be long-suffering. Part of being long-suffering is not telling somebody exactly how tired you are of what they're doing. It's bearing with.

And in your heart you may be having a big wrestling match with your impatience or with your attitude toward someone who has done this egregious thing for the 15th or 16th time. But you don't come up and smile and say, you know, you would try the patience of Job. I mean, we just don't say that to each other.

We try not to. And so we have to find the line where it is no longer acceptable to hide the truth or it is no longer acceptable to represent something in a flattering way or in a polite way rather than telling the truth. At some point we cross a line into the place where the truth needs to be told.

And, you know, your wife may come home with a dress that is really unflattering and she needs to know that. You can't just say, oh, yes, dear, that looks great. Maybe it doesn't and maybe it has some real serious drawbacks to it and she needs to know.

And sometimes within our relationships with one another there are painful truths that need to be communicated and it will rise to the level where I can't just. Here's another good example. What if you have a friend or a relative, and for anybody listening to the sound of my voice, this is not coming from any of my personal experience with anybody that might be listening to me.

So, you know, any time you try to use an example, people are going to say, well, I wonder if that's me. But what if you come in contact with someone. I have come in contact with people in the dim, dark, distant past who had a problem with gossip.

And you spend some time with this person and things start out on a helpful plane. But pretty soon, if you spend more than about five or ten minutes, pretty soon bad topics start coming up. And this person starts telling you stuff about people that you don't want to know.

And, you know, you can change the subject. You can do all kinds of graceful little tap dances to try to worm your way out of a situation like that. But if you wind up being at close quarters for any length of time, sooner or later, you're going to reach a point where you are either participating by remaining silent and let this person rattle on and lead you into mental attitude sins, because you're finding out all kinds of dirt on people that you would rather not know and don't want to hear.

You're either going to participate by your silence or you have to speak up and say, look, I don't want to hear that anymore. This really isn't helpful. I don't think it's honoring to the Lord.

You have to find some kind of way to speak the truth and love to that person, especially if they are a fellow believer. Well, this is what this whole episode in Genesis chapter 27 leads us into, because here is a case where something wrong is about to take place. There is no way to slice this and make Isaac right.

Isaac is wrong to bless Esau. He knows better. The word of God came to Rebekah before the twins were born and said, the elder will serve the younger.

And we know the content of the blessing that Isaac thinks he is giving to Esau. And he says, your brethren will serve you. And he thinks he's talking to Esau.

And this is in flagrant, direct contradiction to the word of God that said the elder will serve the younger. And Esau is reprobate. He is without excuse.

What I find interesting is, as I pointed out to you last time, we know Esau is just something over 100 years old at this point. It hasn't been too long since Isaac. Isaac is just over 100 years old.

Poor Esau is in his early 40s. Because Isaac was 60 when Jacob and Esau were born. Isaac is now somewhere over 100.

Because when Esau is 40, he marries these Hittite women. And they become a bitterness, a mara to his parents. And it is very soon after this that this blessing thing takes place.

So Isaac is something over 100 years old. But Isaac apparently is just stone blind. He can't see his hand in front of his face.

And he thinks he's on his deathbed. He says, I don't know how much longer I'm going to live. I need to get this blessing thing out of the way.

Bring me some game and I'll bless you, Esau. But we know from scripture, Esau lives to the ripe old age of 180. He's going to live, Isaac.

Did I say Esau again? Isaac. Yitzhak. Maybe I ought to just change his name so I didn't

start with a vowel.

Isaac is going to live to be 180 years old. Now this is a full lifetime for any of us. If we live to 80, we'll consider ourselves fortunate.

Well, that's how many years he's still got ahead of him. So he is manifestly not on his deathbed. Not his genuine deathbed.

Why is he in such bad shape? Why is he so blind? Why is he so feeble? What is wrong with him that he thinks his days are numbered and he needs to dispense this blessing 80 years prematurely? I think that Isaac's physical infirmity is a reflection of his spiritual infirmity. That his blindness is illustrative or symbolic or suggestive of a spiritual blindness that has set in. He has blinded himself to the faults of his son.

He has blinded himself to the shortcomings. There's a little subtle clue here that I want to bring to your attention. You know the setup in chapter 27.

We reviewed it last time. Isaac calls Esau in in verse 2 of chapter 27. He says, Behold now I am old, I don't know the day of my death.

Take your weapons, get your bow, go out to the field, hunt game for me, make me savory food such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die. Rebecca was listening and so she recounts this to Jacob. She says in verse 6, Indeed I heard your father speak to Esau your brother, saying bring me game and make savory food for me, that I may eat it and bless you in the presence of the Lord before my death.

Isaac didn't say anything about the presence of the Lord to Esau. When Rebecca overhears this and she realizes this is the blessing, capital T, capital B, in quotes, underlined, bold face. This is the heritage from Abraham that is going to be passed down.

She knows that this is God's blessing. This is the line of covenant promise that Isaac is about to pass on to Esau. In her mind, it's in the presence of the Lord because she thinks in these terms.

But Isaac doesn't say that. This is very interesting because look at what happens. She recounts this to Jacob.

She tells Jacob what Esau said. She says, Obey my voice, do what I command you. They get the two goats and so forth.

She puts the clothes of Esau on him. Then verse 17, She gave the savory food and the bread which she had prepared into the hand of her son Jacob. So he went to his father and said, My father? And he said, Here I am.

Who are you, my son? I know since you said my father, you're obviously one of my sons, but which one? I'm not real sure. Jacob said to his father, I am Esau, your firstborn. I have done just as you told me.

Please arise, sit and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me. He is acting as though he was the one that heard the words of Isaac spoken to Esau. But Isaac hears something in the voice that doesn't sound like Esau to him.

So he says, How is it that you have found this so quickly, my son? Jacob says, Because the Lord your God brought it to me. Now you would think, well, this makes sense. It's the blessing.

It's the big deal. And so God has supernaturally given Esau a good shot at a hind or something that he has brought back and prepared. But this answer raises Isaac's suspicions.

It doesn't alleviate them. It heightens them. Because what does Isaac say in verse 21? Isaac said to Jacob, Come near that I may feel you, my son, and whether you are really my son Esau or not.

What is it that Esau heard that made him so suspicious? I think it is Jacob saying, The Lord your God brought it to me. This is not a characteristic statement that Esau would make. Talking about the Lord God, this is something Rebekah does.

This is something Jacob does. But apparently the relationship, the rapport between Isaac and Esau doesn't include anything about God. And this would be an extremely odd thing.

It strikes Isaac's ear funny that Esau would say, Oh, well, God brought me the game. It would be like somebody having a friend and all they do is talk sports and then suddenly comes out of the blue with a religious comment. And you think, whoa, that's not the basis of our rapport.

And when Isaac hears Jacob say, Well, the Lord your God brought it to me, he says, oh, it rings false. He says that's not something Esau would say. Jacob sort of gets tripped up because his mother threw that in.

From her point of view, this is taking place in the presence of the Lord. And so Jacob says, well, Jacob's not really in touch with how Isaac and Esau get along. He's apparently there kind of at odds.

But Rebekah is in the house all the time. But Rebekah slips up when she adds this in the presence of the Lord thing. And so Jacob, working off of what Rebekah told him, says, oh, well, the Lord your God.

You mentioned that the Lord God is involved in this thing, so the Lord God helped me get

the game. Well, that was never in Esau's mind. It's not a part of their normal rapport.

And so this alarms him. And this is another clue that tells me that Isaac's blindness is not just physical. And his affliction is not just physical.

He is deteriorating because his attention to the things of God has deteriorated. His willingness to pronounce this blessing on Esau is a very manifest blindness to the things of God and the will of God that has been expressed by direct revelation. So when he says, come near that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not, Jacob went near to Isaac, his father, and he felt him and said, the voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.

And he did not recognize him because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands. So he blessed him. And so he's operating on the evidence of his senses.

If Isaac was any sort of in touch with the things of God, you know how God revealed what was going on to Elisha. God reveals to those who are operating within the Spirit, who are operating to seek to please God. They don't end up being deceived.

You don't see the man of God getting deceived. Gehazi doesn't pull anything over Elisha, does he? You don't find Samuel or any of the other great men of the Bible. When they are hitting on all eight cylinders in their relationship with God, nobody puts anything over on them.

To be deceived, you have to already be blind. And Isaac is already blind. And he doesn't get the flash that he would have gotten from God if he was doing the right thing, if he was on the right path.

He has, in a sense, brought this on himself. His blindness is the means by which the blessing is diverted. And his blindness is his fault.

We're going to see. I think one of the reasons he lives another 80 years or so after this is because he's going to wake up. This is going to be a big wake-up call to Isaac.

And interestingly, his spiritual recovery apparently leads to a physical recovery because he's going to live another eight decades. But it does not answer the question as to whether or not this is an okay deception because its end is good. What I would like to suggest to you is that there are three cases that you can make from the episodes of deception in Scripture.

One is the situation, such as is described in Proverbs 19, our Scripture reading this morning, and you can find a slew of others, the passages I gave you in the first session. If your goal is selfish, if your goal is personal, this, in fact, Isaac himself is perpetrating a kind of deception by doing this blessing in secret. The blessing is normally done with the household present.

And all of the sons are present and they each get their portion. Not only does the firstborn son get his inheritance and his double portion and his birthright, but the other sons are apportioned their things. You remember when Jesus tells the prodigal son story and the son who wants to leave says, Father, give me my inheritance and let me go.

The other son says, Well, where is my inheritance? You gave him all of his stuff. Where is mine? The father reminds the son who stays behind, You are with me and everything I have is yours. But the expectation is that when you apportion out the inheritance, the usual thing is for each of the sons to get his.

And Isaac, by attempting to do this in secret, he doesn't tell Rebecca, he doesn't tell Jacob. In the back of his mind, he knows that he's doing something that is not right and that isn't proper. And he doesn't want to take the flack over it, so he just calls Esau in privately.

So he himself is perpetrating a deception and he in turn is going to be deceived. There is a case where you are deceiving and you're hiding the truth and you're misrepresenting the truth for your own personal ends that nobody argues. That's always wrong.

The Bible condemns that outright. There are other cases, and we find ourselves in a category 2 deception here, if you want to number these, where the goal is good, but the means is not. The goal of making sure that the blessing goes to someone who values it and appreciates it for the right reasons, that the word of God is fulfilled, is a good one.

But the means deceiving Isaac is in fact wrong. And we're going to see when we go through the next couple of chapters that Jacob is going to pay in spades for this deception. He has, by deception, obtained the double portion inheritance and he has obtained the birthright.

But he is also going to get double discipline. It is as though by getting this double blessing he's going to bring double discipline on himself and you're going to see a whole series of doubles in the life of Jacob that are not happy. Like his double service to Laban for his wife.

We'll see these as we go along. But I can tell you in advance that the outcome of this is not happy for that reason. However, at the same time, it is the purpose of God that Jacob be the heir of the blessing and of the birthright.

And he in fact gets it. He gets it in a wrong way. But this is another case where because someone fails or because someone does a wrong thing that's not going to thwart the plan of God.

Moses, a few hundred years hence, is going to be told by God after striking a rock and bringing forth water for the children of Israel, on a later occasion, God says, speak to the rock and water will be provided. Moses gets out there and says, shall we bring you forth

water from this rock? And he turns around and whacks it with the staff. What happens? Well, if I was God, the rock would have sat there like a rock and nothing would have happened.

Moses would have egg all over his face and he'd whack it three or four or five more times and no water would come out and his disobedience would be made a big public issue right there in front of all the people. That's how I would do it. What happens? Moses disobeys and does the wrong thing.

It is a sin so grievous that he will not enter the land of Canaan because of it. But does water come forth? And do the people get their drink? It absolutely happens. It comes about through a sin on Moses' part, a disobedience on Moses' part.

He does it in a wrong way, in an arrogant way, but God brings the water forth nevertheless. This blessing is obtained in a wrong way. Nevertheless, Jacob is going to keep the blessing because it's God's will that he have it.

So that's something to distinguish in this particular category of deception. The deception is wrong. Even though the purpose is good, the end does not justify the means.

You don't find that principle in Scripture. The third type of deception is the type that we saw over in Kings where the deception is a perfectly good thing. Elisha telling the Syrians that this is not the town and this is not the way.

Follow me. I will take you to the man whom you seek. There is nothing at all wrong with that.

He's operating in the power of the Spirit. God grants his prayer to blind the soldiers and take them down to Samaria and unblinds them at Elisha's command. This is all done in the power of the Spirit.

The idea of a three-day trip on the part of the Israelites into the wilderness presented to Pharaoh is God's instruction to Moses. That's not the intention. God has no intention of taking them out there for three days and bringing them back, but that's what's presented to Pharaoh.

What is the purpose? And what is the means? You can have a bad purpose and a bad means. You can have a good purpose and still have a bad means. In these cases, you can have a good purpose and a good means, but the means on the surface of it appears to be bad.

It appears to be a deception. But in these cases where you have a good... I think you could put Rahab the harlot protecting the spies into the third category. This gets back to our introduction to this second session.

We have an instinct for when it is the proper thing to be polite and say that something was good even when it really may not have been. To say that we enjoyed something when perhaps we did not. To say that we feel fine when perhaps we don't because we don't want to excite undue concern or alarm.

Someone looks at you and you're pale and sweaty and they say, Are you okay? You say, Oh yes, I'm fine. You may be deathly ill, but for your own reasons, you don't wish to make an issue out of yourself because the word of God is about to be taught or some other thing is going on and you know in the landscape of what is good and what is pleasing to the Lord that this is not the time to make an issue out of something and so you gloss it over and you say everything is fine even though it is perhaps from some point of view not. This is the trickiest area because this is a time when you may misrepresent the truth.

If you look at the words of Paul when he is speaking before some of the councils, he seems to bend the truth a little bit in a place or two. When he talks about the reason that he has come under fire from his fellow Israelites, he is preaching Christ and they don't like it and they start beating up on him and the civil authorities step in, the Roman government henchmen step in and they say what is all the ruckus about it? He says it is on account of the resurrection because he knows that this is going to create a big division between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Well, if you look at the previous context, he wasn't preaching resurrection, he was preaching Christ.

You could say, wow, he is stretching a point to say the least. So it is that third area and I personally don't think that you want to walk very far down that road and say, well, I think it is okay but there are people who do it. The whole reason I bring up this third category and spend any time on it is there are believers who will hop up on this horse and try to ride down the road on it.

This is the bait and switch technique of evangelism. Oh, we are going to have a wonderful movie. Come on down to the church and see this movie.

That is not why you want them to come. You are inviting them to the movie because after the movie is the stinger. Now that you have the captive audience, you have the evangelist who is going to come up there and preach hellfire and brimstone.

Or come to our luncheon. We are going to have a wonderful time. We are going to talk about cosmetics.

We have a wonderful lady from such and such a cosmetic company and she is going to tell you how to tell if you are a spring or an autumn or this, that and the other. And then once you get there, they are passing a basket and they are pounding away and you don't tell people ahead of time, oh, by the way, there is going to be an evangelistic message attached to this that you are going to be captive for. But people justify this in

their minds and they put this consciously or unconsciously as a category three that because the end is good, that makes the means good also.

They have protected the spies and she told a lie and that was okay. She sort of did a fan dance around the truth there. And that is sort of what we are doing here because what could be more important than getting the gospel to them? What I find is that there is a strong focus on God and His glory every place you find a deception that falls into that third category in the Bible.

You look at Elisha, there is no doubt in anyone's mind, especially the Syrians who are the victims of the deceit, that it is God's power that enabled this man to lead them on a 12 or 15 mile hike down to Samaria and then not to recognize him until he prayed to God. And then they are treated with grace. They are fed a meal and released.

The king says, Should I kill him? Should I kill him? And Elisha says, No, send him home. Give him a meal and send him home. And they come away with a powerful impression that there is a God in Israel.

You have to be careful with this because people at these luncheons and bait and switch things will say, See, that is what we want to do. We want to leave people with an impression of God. But you don't think that the Syrian soldiers come away feeling as though they have been deceived.

Wait a minute. You blinded us. You told us, Are they complaining? Are they feeling as though they have been deceived, that they have been cheated? They are grateful and they are pondering the reality of a God in Israel.

You look at the spies and Rahab. These men are on a mission from God like the Blues Brothers. Rahab recognizes it and they have a covenant relationship.

It is necessary for them to get back to Israel so that Rahab will be protected. This is life and death not only for the spies, but this is life for a life. Rahab, the only way she is going to be protected when the walls come down because they are coming down whether the spies return or not.

The only way she and her family can be protected is if these men make it back to tell the Israelites about the scarlet cord in the window. This is a matter of life and death. It is a matter of believers protecting the lives of fellow believers.

It is not any different than the people letting Paul down through a basket out the window. Why didn't they just walk him right past the guards? If God wants him to live he will supernaturally blind the guards. That is a deception.

You are letting somebody out without being seen. That is subterfuge. God does not always work through supernatural means.

Esau may by this time have children. Even if you say God could strike Esau down and that will make Jacob the heir, what if Esau already has a son by his Hittite wives? What if his firstborn is already on the scene? Now he will be the heir. It is not enough for Esau to keel over with a stroke.

Did God have an alternate plan? Did Jacob and Rebekah not lie? Would God have seen to it? Of course he would have. The problem with this method is the issue, and we find ourselves looking at it, is the deception of Rebekah and Jacob not the glory of God. Rebekah does not fall on her face before the Lord.

Jacob does not say, My mother, what does God think about this? And because God is not in it, there is no mention of God. There is no thinking of God. This is a quick... Remember in Proverbs 19 it said the one whose feet are hasty to action is going to stumble.

This is a hasty action. She panics. Rebekah is a great woman of faith, but she panics.

And as a result of this, when Jacob leaves to go find a wife from the people of Paddan Aram, Rebekah will never see him again. The son that she loves and the son that she protects, she is going to be separated from him. She is never going to see him or any of her grandkids.

That is going to be the last time she sees him is when he departs to go north to the family of Laban. Jacob is going to have 20 years of labor, 20 years of servitude up north, away from his family, away from all of the things that he has chiseled his way into with the birthright and the blessing. And it is a result of this deception.

So this is not all fun and roses, and it has its consequence. I guess the primary conclusion to draw is that this is the verse my father inscribed in my Bible that was given to me when I graduated high school. Whatsoever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men.

It is easy to act in haste, to have a short-term prospect, to panic, and to think, well, this is a crisis. It calls for crisis measures. But a crisis should turn our eyes to the Lord.

There are so many times when God will speak, God will intervene, God will give guidance, but there is no appeal to God in this situation. And we don't want to let ourselves get surprised by an emergency, to get surprised by something that comes up suddenly, get surprised by something that really concerns us, and it seems like, well, something has got to be done now. And to not bring it before the Lord and be sure that what we do is pleasing in His sight and that we are relying on His grace and His provision and His resources and that we can stand before Him on judgment day and say, Lord, this is why I did what I did.

This is how I was exercising faith and confidence in Your promise and in Your provision in this situation. And we should be warned because even though the outcome is within the

will of God here, and there are people who get saved as a result of a bait-and-switch thing, that doesn't make the means right. There are people who get saved in all kinds of off-the-wall ministries on television.

That doesn't validate that method or that ministry. It just means that God will accomplish His purpose whether we do right or whether we do wrong. And we have to look at why we do what we do, make sure the motive is right.

We have to make sure that the means that we use is in fact within the will of God. If you get a message from God that says, tell Pharaoh three days, okay. If you're the prophet of God under the ministry of the Spirit and He says, take him down to Samaria and tell him thus and so, that's an entirely different thing.

We're guided by what the Word of God says and there's an awful lot more against deception than there is for it. And so we don't evangelize with bait-and-switch. We don't mislead other believers.

If you need a final reminder, just think about Ananias and Sapphira. What is the motive of the heart? What is the means by which we seek to glorify God? And that's the bottom line. It's the glory of God that's at issue.

It is the praise of God like we sang about this morning in our hymns. There is no praise of God in this strap-the-goat-skin-on and deceive-the-father mode of behavior. So it should be a caution to us.

We're going to see the outcome of this as we continue our study of Jacob and the sadness in Esau's blessing when we resume our study next time. But let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you that we are not left to rely upon our own resources or our own devices in the accomplishment of your purpose, but that you have given us everything that we need.

You have made provision through your Word and through your Spirit to give us a path that is pleasing in your sight and glorifying to our Savior as we conduct ourselves in this world in our relationships with believers and with unbelievers. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enable us to see the right path, to identify it, and then to have the faith and the perseverance to follow that path as each day faces us with its challenges and with its tests. We pray that in all things, our lives, both in the eyes of our fellow human beings, in the eyes of the angelic hosts, and most importantly, in your eyes, is pleasing and worthy and reflective of your glory and your grace.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.