

Intro: I want to begin this morning by taking a trip down memory lane. I'm a sports fan...I've been a sports fan for as long as I can remember. In my family, we played sports, talked about sports, and watched sports. But watching sports on t.v. when I grew up in the early 80's was nothing like watching sports today. Today, you can order the sports package and watch sports 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; it wasn't like that when I was young. And for that reason, there was one t.v. show that stood head and shoulders above the rest: ABC's Wide World Of Sports.

To recreate some of the magic, I managed to dig up a YouTube video featuring the intro that was played before each show (**show clip**). *The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat*, that's a good description of sports. As morbid as it sounds, during the intro of the show, I always waited for the one scene where the ski jumper crashed as he made his final approach. It was the *agony of defeat* that I was particularly drawn to...perhaps this explains why I am drawn to the Vancouver Canucks.

I haven't wanted to talk about our Stanley Cup Finals loss...the agony of defeat is a bitter pill to swallow, especially the third time around. But if I am honest, the reason I've struggled to talk about the loss has less to do with who hoisted the Cup and more to do with what happened in the aftermath.

All of you saw the images of the riot...you saw the live footage. We saw anger, hatred, destruction, and violence. But equally horrifying was the celebration, the voyeurism that went along with it. Cars flipped over, fists flying, broken glass, and looting. Some left the danger zone as fast as they could, others lingered to watch, to be

entertained. The city was burning and at least one couple found the time to share an intimate moment.

Reflecting on all I've seen and heard, what surprised me most is not the fact of the riot; riots take place in cities all over the world. What surprises me most is that people are surprised that something like this could happen in beautiful, Vancouver. Every year, for a number of years running, Vancouver has been voted the most livable city in the world...a place of safety and unparalleled beauty...the city where sky, ocean and mountains meet. But then this...

For some, in the riots, the dark underbelly of Vancouver was exposed. I would suggest that the Vancouver riot didn't expose the dark underbelly of the city, it exposed the dark underbelly of the human heart.

There is a brokenness in our world that is difficult to ignore. You see it in violence, oppression, and poverty but you see it just as clearly in our misguided longings, our relationships, and our addictions. Gone are the days where the good guys wear white hats and the bad guys wear black hats; it's more complex than that. Brokenness, sin, and evil draw a dividing line down the middle of our own hearts.

But there was another side to the Vancouver riots wasn't there? Thousands of volunteers descended upon Vancouver over the next few days and joined in the cleanup. Amidst all the broken bits of glass, a beauty began to emerge. I'm not talking about the restored beauty of the city, but the restoration of human beauty and dignity. Beauty and brokenness.

Within the human heart, these two are always in tension: beauty and brokenness. We've been made in the image of God, and yet we consistently fall short of God's glorious nature because we consistently choose to live apart from Him and His ways.

The Bible gives us good news: the world is not spinning madly out of control. God has not abandoned the cosmos, us, or His good plans; as one author puts it, God is utterly committed to putting this world to rights. This is our Father's world, and for that reason we have hope. In the midst of brokenness, God can bring forth beauty and blessing; this is His commitment.

This weekend marks the beginning of our Summer teaching series through the Book of Genesis. If you've been a part of our church for the last two years, then you might remember that this is our third foray into the Book of Genesis. In the Fall of 2009 we taught through Genesis 1-11, last Summer we taught through Genesis 12-25, and this Summer, we will pick up the story in Genesis 25 and take it to the end of the Book. I've entitled this series, "*Beauty and Brokenness: The Unfolding Story of God's Redemption.*"

The Bible reminds us that at the heart of all brokenness lies our broken relationship with God. And so, it shouldn't surprise us that God had a relational solution to the world's brokenness. He called one man (Abraham) and his family into relationship, promising to be their God, promising to prosper, protect, and bless them.

But this calling, this blessing, was never intended to be hoarded by Abraham and his family; God blessed them for the sake of the world.

In Genesis 12, God spoke to Abraham saying, "*I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. 3 I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.*"¹

This morning we're going to look at two different that shed light on Abraham's family. If you have your Bibles, I want to encourage you to turn with me to Genesis 25, starting at verse 19. If you are using the Blue Bibles right in front of you, you can find our text on page 38. And as you are turning there I want to share two things with you: the first is the context, and the second is a warning.

So first the **context**. By the time we pick up the story in Genesis 25, Abraham has died and Isaac (his son) is no longer the principal player; the narrative focuses in on his twin sons: Esau and Jacob. The incredible promises and responsibility God gave to Abraham were passed on to Isaac, and then along come these twin boys, ready to take their place in God's unfolding story of redemption and blessing.

Now let me give you the **warning**. I've said that God is absolutely committed to putting the world to rights. I've also said that God's solution to the brokenness in the world was to call Abraham into relationship, and to use his family to bring blessing to the world. But what we're going to discover is that the family God chose was far from perfect themselves. The raw materials God uses to bring blessing and transformation to the world are...well...very raw. We're not going to find much light in the stories we're about to read today, but in a strange way, it is this very fact that gives us cause for hope.

¹ Genesis 12:2-3, New Living Translation.

“19 This is the account of Abraham’s son Isaac. Abraham became the father of Isaac, 20 and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean. 21 Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.

22 The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, “Why is this happening to me?” So she went to inquire of the LORD. 23 The LORD said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”

24 When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. 25 The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. 26 After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them. 27 The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. 28 Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. 30 He said to Jacob, “Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!” (That is why he was also called Edom. 31 Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright.” 32 “Look, I am about to die,” Esau said. “What good is the birthright to me?” 33 But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he

swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.

Every woman who is expecting for the first time is filled with questions. Having never been pregnant before, Rebekah probably asked the question, “*Is this normal?*” a hundred times. But even never having experienced pregnancy before, the activity within her womb alarmed her. And so she asked the LORD, “*what’s going on?*” The LORD replied, “*You’re carrying twin boys, each of your son will become a nation, but the older will serve the younger.*”

In vs. 22 we read, “the babies **jostled** each other within her,” but the English word “jostled” doesn’t do justice to the original Hebrew word. A more accurate translation might say that there was a “crushing,” or an “oppressing” going on inside her. Sadly, the battle royal that began in the womb, continued as these twins were delivered and it lasted for much of their lives.

Esau was born first, but we’re told that as Esau came out of the birth canal, Jacob was right behind him, grasping at his heel. The two boys were given interesting names. Victor Hamilton notes that, “[Esau] is named in accordance with his appearance, and [Jacob] in accordance with his actions.”² The two brothers couldn’t have been more different: the older was hairy, and the younger smooth. The older liked the open country, while Jacob stayed close to home. The older was crass and impulsive, while the younger was calculated and conniving.

² Victor P. Hamilton, *The New International Commentary of the Old Testament: The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50*, 178.

The name “Esau” seems to mean both “red” and “hairy,” and the narrator seems to portray him much like a beast: he likes the open country, he’s wild, unpredictable, and unthinking.

The name “Jacob” is somewhat of a play on words. His name is likely an abbreviated form of the longer name “Jacob-el” (yacob-alel), which means, “God will protect”. But from the moment Jacob entered the birth canal, He wasn’t ready to leave anything up to the God’s provision or timing...he was the kind of guy who took matters into his own hands. Even while Rebekah was in labour, Jacob was trying to get ahead of his brother by yanking on his heel. Literally, the name “Jacob” means “he who grasps the heel,” but figuratively it means, “he deceives”.

It’s hard to fully appreciate what’s going on in this story because we live at a time when the term “birthright” doesn’t mean anything to us. Let me try to bring the ancient concept of birthright into the present. We need to begin by imagining a time when being the first born male meant winning the family lottery.

Imagine that your father owned a business in today’s day, and by right of being born first, you would automatically inherit the titles CEO and President; but more, you’d also be the majority shareholder. The eldest son was entitled to receive two portions of the father’s wealth. So, if there were three sons in the family, the eldest son would receive two thirds ownership, and the remaining two sons would split the remaining third between them. In the case of only two sons, the eldest would still receive two portions, meaning, he would get everything and the younger son would be on his own.

The birthright was no small thing. But beyond the financial aspect, the birthright entitled the eldest to become the next leader of the family. And for this specific family, theologically, the birthright was tied to carrying the promises given to Abraham into the next generation.³ God had promised Abraham that through his offspring, all the nations of the world would be blessed. This promise, spoken to Abraham, was handed down to Isaac, and Esau was next in line...he was the firstborn.

But God said in advance: *the older will serve the younger*. I wonder, did Isaac or Rebekah ever tell their sons? We’re not told. But from observing Jacob, it’s clear that he was always working the angles to get ahead. And so when Esau came in from the field, weak, famished, and begging for stew, Jacob saw his opportunity. *I’ll give you the stew, if you swear to give me your birthright*. And incredibly, Esau agrees.

In one impulsive act, Esau sold his future to fill his stomach. In verse 34, the narrator comments on this little escapade, but what might surprise you is that he makes no mention of Jacob’s monkey business. Instead, he judges Esau’s actions saying, “*So Esau despised his birthright*.” Anyone who passes off their birthright for a bowl stew, clearly has a problem with values and priorities.

Now before we move on to the second story in Genesis 27, I want to point out that there was more to this family’s mess than sibling rivalry. Verses 27- 28 spell it out: “*27 The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was*

³ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 377.

a quiet man, staying among the tents. 28 Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.” Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. The boy’s competition and hatred was fueled by two parents who chose sides and picked favourites. Some of you have come from families where picking favourites was a part of the package; you know first hand the destruction that comes along with it.

The situation gets worse in Genesis 27. Isaac is aging, his sight is nearly gone, and he doesn’t know how much longer he will live. And so, Isaac called for his eldest son, Esau, and Isaac told him that he wanted to bestow a blessing upon him before he died. But before Isaac blessed Esau, he made one small request of his son: “*get your weapons—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. 4 Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die.*”

Rebekah overheard this conversation and she formulated a plan to ensure that Isaac’s blessing would fall on her favourite son, instead of Esau. *Jacob, your father is going to bless Esau! As soon as he comes back with some wild game and fixes it the way your father likes it, your father is going to bless him...I am not going to let that happen! Here’s what we’ll do...go get two young goats from the flock and I’ll make some food the way your father likes it...he’ll never know the difference.*

Jacob immediately grasps his mother’s plan but he objects. In vs. 11-12 we read, “*But my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I’m a man with smooth skin. 12 What if my father touches me? I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a curse on myself rather than a blessing.*” Rebekah wants to take advantage of her husband’s blindness, and Jacob doesn’t seem put off by the morality of his mother’s plan...his only concern is getting caught and suffering the consequences.

The natural question is ask is: *why all this fuss over a “blessing”?* In our day and age, we are bombarded by words: in conversations, on tv, the radio, our ipods, or text message...*words are just words.* We tend to think of words pragmatically; words are simply the vehicle we use to describe reality. In a biblical worldview, there is power in the spoken word, particularly, there is power in the act of speaking a blessing.

One scholar writes, “Blessing is understood as a world-transforming act;”⁴ a spoken word of blessing spoken could alter reality because these words were seen as connected to the One God who shaped all reality.

There **is** great power in spoken blessing; Naomi and I take every opportunity we can to speak blessing over our kids. Have you ever wondered why we conclude every Sunday service with a spoken blessing? Because I believe that when we speak words of blessing, in keeping with God’s purposes, He brings those purposes into being.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation Commentary*, 227.

Isaac was going to bless Esau with prosperity, abundance (vs. 28), power, dominion (vs. 29a), and protection (29b)⁵...and Rebekah did whatever it took to make sure this blessing, this future, fell on Jacob.

So...Isaac couldn't see, but he could still taste, smell, and feel. Rebekah took care of the food and then got some of Esau's clothes that smelled like the open field and put them on Jacob. She also took goatskins and put them on the smooth skin of her youngest son. When Jacob went into his father's tent, Isaac was fooled, and Jacob stole the blessing intended for Esau.

Genesis 27 ends with Esau coming in from the field and uncovering the deception...he threatened to kill Jacob. It was more than an idle threat and Rebekah knew it; Jacob was sent to stay with her side of the family, over 500 miles away.

Application: It's quite a story isn't it? Does it make any of you feel better about your own family? As I read this story again and again, a question came to mind that perhaps some of you are asking: *If God wanted to bring blessing to the world through a family, why didn't He choose a better family?*

Jacob doesn't strike us as a likely candidate to bring God's blessing to the world; he didn't even bring blessing to his own family. But Jacob and his messy family give us the perfect window into the way God works. Clearly, we don't have to have it all together to be

invited into God's family. Clearly, our brokenness doesn't disqualify us from being chosen, transformed, or used in God's grand plans to bless the world.

God's solution to the brokenness of the world is to gather broken people and begin to transform them. Brokenness, sin, and evil aren't just out there somewhere...they draw a dividing line down the middle of our own hearts. We are simultaneously bearers of the solution and a part of the problem.⁶

Tom Wright pens the following, "The early Christians did not believe in progress. They did not think the world was getting better and better under its own steam--or even under the steady influence of God. They knew God had to do something fresh to put [the world] to rights. But neither did they believe that the world was getting worse and worse and that their task was to escape it altogether...They believed that God was going to do for the whole cosmos what He had done for Jesus at Easter."⁷

At Easter, God brought Jesus back from the dead; He gave Jesus new life. And that is exactly what God intends to do for us, for our neighbours, for the world. Jesus was a descendant of Abraham, and in Jesus, God's promise to bless the world came to its pinnacle. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, God dealt with brokenness, sin, and evil. Now, through Jesus, He intends to bring us back from the dead,

⁵ Brueggemann, 232.

⁶ N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, 53.

⁷ Wright, 93.

to give us a new life, to make us new...we are both recipients of this life and witnesses to this life all at the same time.

In one sense, it's our brokenness that qualifies us to be God's witnesses in the world; we become a living picture of God's forgiveness and grace...we become walking invitation: *if God can transform me, He can do the same for you.*

This is the Apostle Paul's story...before he encountered Jesus, Paul had given the best hours of his day to rounding up and killing Christians.

Later in life, he wrote the following to his protege Timothy, "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*"—and *I am the worst of them all. 16 But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.*"⁸

In 1 Corinthians 1:27-29, the Apostle Paul writes, "*27 God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him.*"

This Summer, I want us to grow in our understanding of who God is, what He's up to, and how our lives fit within the grand story He's

writing. The Book of Genesis, and in fact the entire Bible tells the story of a God who is fully committed to putting the world to rights. I know this sounds grandiose, and while God is working at a comic scale, more often than not, we see His work at a personal scale. People encounter Jesus and their life begins to change. The arena for God's activity your life...it's my life. The canvas for God's purposes is your life...

It's not the "quality" of the family we were born into that makes the difference, it's not our ability or skill, God's the One makes the difference. Our history, our shortcomings, our failings are not the limiting factor...when God is involved, there is no limiting factor because He's brilliant.

God takes us as we are but does not leave as we are...the Jacob we encounter in Genesis 25 is not the same man we will encounter in Genesis 50. Most of us would be tempted to give up on on a guy like Jacob, but not God; He never gives up on us.

Jacob didn't grow into a world-changer, a world-blessor over night, but after an encounter with God, slowly his life begins to change. By the end of his life, Jacob and his family have brought blessing to the entire known world.

God's solution to the brokenness in the world remains a relational one...He sent His Son, Jesus, to deal with brokenness, sin, and evil. And He continues to call broken and sinful people to come be a part of His family, to experience transformation, and to join Him in bringing blessing to the world.

⁸ 1 Timothy 1:15-16, New Living Translation.