

**First Christian Church (Lawrence, KS)**  
**Dr. Barry M. Foster**  
**June 19, 2022 (Father's Day)**

**“The Power of Blessing”**

Genesis 27:1-40 (NIV)

*27 When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him, “My son.”*

*“Here I am,” he answered.*

*2 Isaac said, “I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death. 3 Now then, get your equipment—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.”*

*5 Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back, 6 Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, 7 ‘Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the Lord before I die.’ 8 Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: 9 Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. 10 Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies.”*

*11 Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, “But my brother Esau is a hairy man while I have 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.”*

*13 His mother said to him, “My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say; go and get them for me.”*

*14 So he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and she prepared some tasty food, just the way his father liked it. 15 Then Rebekah took the best clothes of Esau her older son, which she had in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob. 16 She also covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goatskins. 17 Then she handed to her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made.*

*18 He went to his father and said, “My father.”*

*“Yes, my son,” he answered. “Who is it?”*

*19 Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.”*

20 Isaac asked his son, “How did you find it so quickly, my son?”

“The Lord your God gave me success,” he replied.

21 Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not.”

22 Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, “The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” 23 He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he proceeded to bless him. 24 “Are you really my son Esau?” he asked.

“I am,” he replied.

25 Then he said, “My son, bring me some of your game to eat, so that I may give you my blessing.”

Jacob brought it to him and he ate; and he brought some wine and he drank. 26 Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come here, my son, and kiss me.”

27 So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said,

“Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed. 28 May God give you heaven’s dew and earth’s richness—an abundance of grain and new wine. 29 May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed.”

30 After Isaac finished blessing him, and Jacob had scarcely left his father’s presence, his brother Esau came in from hunting. 31 He too prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father. Then he said to him, “My father, please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.”

32 His father Isaac asked him, “Who are you?”

“I am your son,” he answered, “your firstborn, Esau.”

33 Isaac trembled violently and said, “Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him—and indeed he will be blessed!”

34 When Esau heard his father’s words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, “Bless me—me too, my father!”

35 But he said, “Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.”

36 Esau said, “Isn’t he rightly named Jacob? This is the second time he has taken advantage of me: He took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing!” Then he asked, “Haven’t you reserved any blessing for me?”

*37 Isaac answered Esau, “I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So what can I possibly do for you, my son?”*

*38 Esau said to his father, “Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!” Then Esau wept aloud.*

*39 His father Isaac answered him, “Your dwelling will be away from the earth’s richness, away from the dew of heaven above. 40 You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck.”*

**[Slide 1]**    *Opening*

Good morning church! The passage you’ve just heard would certainly not be a typical section of Scripture to read on Father’s Day. The story of Jacob’s deception of his father, Isaac, in order to steal the patriarch’s blessing from his brother, Esau, would fit more naturally into a series on the life of the patriarchs in Genesis, or perhaps a character study of Jacob—both of which would be quite instructive and beneficial for our understanding of the book of Genesis, the history of Israel, the nature of God’s covenant with Abraham, and many other things that could be helpful for our spiritual growth. Nevertheless, I want to assure you that this passage contains some valuable instruction for us today—whether you are a father, a grandfather, a parent, or just a person who wants to make a difference in this world for the Lord.

**[Slide 2]**    *Introduction*

Let’s begin by rehearsing where this story fits in the narrative of Genesis.

In chapter 12, God called Abraham to leave his home and his relatives and go to the land of Canaan. At the time Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were childless, yet God promised to give them a son. In fact, God made a covenant with Abraham and promised to make him into an entire nation of people, all descended from the son God would give him. Furthermore, God would give those descendants the land of Canaan as their inheritance. And finally, God blessed Abraham with a special blessing, a blessing that had prophetic significance, for it signaled God’s promise to bring blessing to the entire world through a future son of Abraham.

*“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”* (Genesis 12:2-3).

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The last portion of this covenantal promise of blessing to Abraham included a special three-fold promise by which God would bring his blessing to the whole world. It promised a son of Abraham who would be the Messiah, the king of the people who were descended from Abraham and lived in the land of Canaan. That same son would also be the promised “seed” who would solve the problem of sin that had wrecked God’s creation since the fall of Adam and Eve. And he would rule over all the nations of the world and over the whole of God’s creation as the king of the universe.

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That blessing was passed down from Abraham to his son, Isaac, the son God had promised. After Abraham died, God reaffirmed his covenant with Abraham with Isaac. *“The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees and my instructions.”* (Genesis 26:2-4).

The language of this covenant echoes the earlier promises to Abraham—not only the first one in chapter 12, but each of the several reaffirmations and expansions in the following chapters. Note especially the repetition of the crucial portion of the blessing: *“through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.”*

The final clause is also significant; it points to the conditions required to receive the promised blessing—ongoing obedience to God’s commands, the visible evidence of a genuine faith. What this indicates is that the reaffirmation of God’s promise that he offers to Isaac carries with it an understood condition: Isaac, and each generation that followed, must commit themselves to living according to the covenant in order to receive the blessings that were promised in that covenant. That directly plays into the story we heard this morning.

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We come then to the opening of our passage: Isaac, the promised son of Abraham, is now old and nearing death. He understands the importance of passing on this covenant and divine promise of blessing to his own son. But there is a problem in the family, a problem that has been growing since his two sons were struggling with one another in Rebekah’s womb.

Before the twins were born, God had told Rebekah that the younger would rule over the older—the complete opposite of what was normal in that culture. You would expect, then, that the parents—who had prayed for Rebekah to become pregnant, and sought God to understand what was happening in the womb—would be seeking the Lord for wisdom to know how to prepare their sons for this unusual future. But as the two boys grew up, the family dynamics were anything but healthy. Isaac (who perhaps doubted whether Rebekah had indeed heard from God about the boys’ futures) resisted the prophetic promise and favored Esau, the older son. Rebekah favored Jacob, the younger, and tried to force matters by manipulation and deception, as if she could bring about what God had promised on her own.

The sons, for their part, did no better. Esau proved himself uninterested in spiritual matters, choosing self-gratification and his own interests and concerns above the promise of God, the covenantal blessing, and faithfulness to the Lord. Jacob lived up to his name (“schemer”) by taking advantage of his brother in order to gain Esau’s birthright for himself. Now he teams up with his mother to deceive his father and steal the blessing for himself.

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When we read this story, we usually focus on Jacob’s deception of his father. But if we read a little more closely, we can see that he is not the only one in the family who is working an angle. We see the manipulation and scheming, not only of Jacob, but of Rebekah, who is the one pushing the whole deal from the start. Isaac himself is still resisting God’s directive and trying to bring Esau within the covenant, despite all the evidence of Esau’s life that shows he has no interest in doing so. Even Esau, who desperately begs for a blessing, is only doing so in order to assure himself of some measure of wealth. Each of them are trying to work things in their own favor, in the hopes of getting what they want.

We can also see the fruit of flawed parenting: family discord and warped character development in the sons that are directly related to the failures of the parents. But despite their failures, we also see God’s redemptive power working through imperfect people to achieve his goal of bringing blessing to the world.

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But what I want you to see today is something that is often missed when we read this story: it has to do with the centrality of the blessing that Isaac had to give and which both Jacob and Esau sought. What was it? Why was it so important? Why does it matter to us today?

[Slide 8]     *What is a “blessing”?*

What is a “blessing”? It is a pronouncement of good to come from God, a prophetic declaration in the form of a prayer. In the prayer, the one giving the blessing states what will come about, *based on what God has said*, with the unspoken understanding that he or she is implicitly asking God to fulfill what he has promised for whoever is receiving the blessing.

Praying a blessing over someone is not the same thing as simply declaring your arbitrary wishes you would like to see come true. It is not what some have called “name it and claim it.” But it is a way to speak out what God has said, to declare truths that are based on what God has promised, so that what has been conceived in the mind of God becomes real in the life of someone.

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For Isaac, the blessing he spoke over Jacob was directly connected to the promise given to Abraham and the covenant represented by that promise. We can see that signaled in the repetition of the wording from Genesis 12:3 in 27:29. Because it was tied to that covenant, once it was spoken, it could not be changed or taken back. It had prophetic inspiration and prophetic power precisely because it was tied to a word from God—and once that word was given, it could not be altered.

Esau didn’t understand that at all. As usual, he only thought in terms of his own satisfaction, of material gains, of getting what he wanted. He had no interest in the spiritual truths or the covenantal connection to God. All he cared about was what he could get from the god whom his father and grandfather served.

But the blessing of God is not just (or even primarily) about wealth, or property, or financial gains. It’s not a way to ensure that you never experience any difficulties or suffer losses or go through unpleasant times. God’s blessing does include all kinds of expressions of his goodness, including abundance, as we can see in the first part of Isaac’s blessing for his son. And his blessing is always good, as Paul Taylor reminded us over the past two weeks.

Most of all, what we need to understand, and hold onto is this: God’s blessing is tied to his word—what he has promised, what he has said, which is always reflective of his character and his nature. Praying God’s word as a blessing is a way for us to actualize God’s promises for people.

[Slide 10] *Why is it important?*

Why is this “blessing” thing so important?

Isaac’s example of speaking a blessing over his son is a great reminder to us—to all of us, but especially to dads. A father’s voice make a difference. My friend, Don Lewis, who has preached for us here before, talks about the

importance of the “bass voice” when raising children. More than the voice, though, the words that a father speaks to his children or grandchildren, to his sons-in-law and his daughters-in-law, have enormous power to shape them for good.

Even if we only listen to what psychologists tell us, or for that matter, what common sense would tell us, it is obvious that what dads (and moms) say to and about their children has a huge impact on how those children grow up and who they become as a result.

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We see all around us the damage that is the result of parents who belittled their children, who reprimanded them harshly, who threatened and bullied their kids into submission. We see the damage from parents who ridiculed their kids, who made impossible demands upon them, who gave orders without compassion or mercy and expected more from their children than those kids could ever give. We see the shattered lives of young people whose parents failed to correct them or instruct them or lead them. And we see the disastrous results of parents who praised their children for doing nothing, and taught them to believe that the world owed them everything, that they deserved to be treated like little gods and could have whatever they wanted.

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But we can also see the good that can come when mom and dad speak blessing over their children. When we find the promises of God, the truths of God, and prayerfully and honestly speak truthful things, hope-filled declarations of what God has said about them, and for them, and to them. We can see the good that comes when we correct our children consistently, with both grace and truth, not leaving one out for the other, so that we don’t kill their sense of self-worth or inflate it beyond what is healthy and right.

When we speak blessing over our kids, blessing that isn’t just our wish list for them, but God’s good promises, we can see life-transforming moments right before our eyes. When we affirm our love for them, based on God’s love for them, trust begins to grow, and their capacity for faith increases. When we speak encouragement to them, it builds their confidence and their resilience; they develop a stronger resolve to try hard things, to try new things (maybe not new vegetables right away, but eventually). When we speak faith-filled words, built upon the word of God, and live according to those words, they have a roadway of biblical principles and biblical truth that leads them to Jesus Christ and the goodness of a life that God blesses.

[Slide 13] *Why does this matter to us?*

At this point, some of you might be thinking, “*Pastor, that all sounds fine, but my children are all grown up now. We’re past that time in life.*”

No, you’re not. First of all, your sons and your daughters may not be children anymore, and you can’t treat them like children. But you can still speak blessing over them—privately in prayer, and verbally, when you talk to them. You can still proclaim the goodness of God and his promises to them.

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Second, if you have grandchildren, or great-grandchildren, your purpose in God still includes them. You may be tempted to follow the world’s ideas and think that your job is to spoil them. But that’s a fool’s errand, and a waste of the life of God that you have been given. You have the opportunity to speak life into them, to speak goodness to them, to remind them of the words of God and his blessings that he longs to pour out upon them. Your words can multiply God’s influence when you’re building upon what your children are saying to their children, providing that they’re saying the things they’ve learned from you and from God to those grands and great-grands.

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But even if you aren’t a parent at all; even if you’re young and single; even if you’re disconnected from your family for whatever reasons, there is still a reason for you to care about this and to choose to make it a way of life, a habit that you will develop. As a church, we are entering into a season of transition—we are opening the doors for God to begin to bring younger people in, and to bring us to younger people. And I don’t know if you’re aware of it or not, but younger generations today aren’t filled with godly ideas. They aren’t keenly interested in learning biblical truths. And many of them suffer from acute fatherlessness. You have an opportunity to impact them with the love of God the Father.

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It is easy to complain about what is going on around us in the world today. There is a lot that is wrong, a lot that is broken, more broken perhaps than ever before. The level of casual, indifferent brutality and violence is off the charts. One of the most common attitudes we see is the lack of respect for anyone whom I don’t like while I demand everyone’s respect for me—and the freedom to do whatever I feel like doing, no matter what damage it does to anyone else. Daily we see insanity parading as enlightenment, and we hear powerful voices demanding that we conform to their imaginary world where the ever-increasing list of slogans and catch-phrases measures whether or not you are allowed to belong.



The world is filled with people who bounce like pinballs between depression and rage; who are addicted to every poisonous thing out there; who are morally bankrupt, without a reason to change; who are shattered from abuse, who have become accustomed to living in a world where they are seen as a commodity, where their value is based on what they can provide for someone else, or what they can pretend to be; and all the while they are desperate for love. Our world is filled with fatherless generations; they are desperate for a father.

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Father's Day is therefore a great day to be reminded that we have two powerful weapons in our arsenal as we look at the world around us. Instead of just cursing the darkness, we have a chance to bring light into the world.

(1) We can start by blessing our children and grandchildren: praying over them the truths of Scripture and the promises of God. We can speak prophetic blessings over them; Holy-Spirit inspired hopes for good that God wants to bring to them. We can choose to encourage them—not with empty praise but with genuine affirmation of who they are, and what they can do as followers of Jesus. We can instruct them and guide them and correct them and empower them with faith-filled declarations of what God has said about them and to them.

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Let me give you two simple examples from my own life. When I was a child, not quite as young as you see me in this picture, but from the time I was about seven years old, my mother—who at that time had not yet started college herself, that would come later, after she had five children at home—my mother would say to me, "*Barry, when you go to college, . . .*" I never once heard her say, "*if you go to college.*" It was always, "*when you go to college.*" I grew up with a word inside me that shaped my future. My mother loved and valued education—a godly thing—and she imparted that love to me even before she was able to experience it herself (college, that is). She spoke a life-giving word to me that was built upon a biblical value—learning—and it shaped my expectations about myself, about life, about what mattered and what didn't matter. We didn't have money for me for college—but that was never the issue. It was already set in my heart. Money was just an obstacle that we would have to deal with when the time came.

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The second example is from early in our marriage, after our second child was born. Sometime early on, once the two of them were both sleeping in the same room, Mary started singing a little song to them. She had come up with the words and the tune herself (I think I may have helped with the arrangement a little, but it

was mostly her—under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.) It was a simple song that said, “*I love Jonathan Jeffrey, I love Jennifer Lynn; you are just the best kids, you’re the best kids; I’ll sing it again.*” We sang that song to them over and over and over, at bedtime or naptime, when we were playing, or in the car. Now, when the other two came along, we had to adjust the lyrics to include them, of course, which made it harder to get everything in, but we continued to sing it to them.

The point was simple and yet so very powerful. Over and over, with a melody that wrote those words deep in their spirit, those kids heard this truth—you are beloved by your parents, who think you’re the greatest, and who aren’t going to change their mind about that at all. You know what? They grew up believing that Mom and Dad loved them (which helped them understand what it meant that God loved them). And they grew up believing that we thought they were the best kids. So they learned to trust us, to be confident when they didn’t feel like they were the best kids, when they were having trouble with whatever, feeling like they failed or didn’t measure up to whatever test was being thrown at them from their world at school or in their own minds. They learned that they could always come to us and know what we would think about them.

They heard a blessing spoken over them, and it took root in their hearts and grew up until it became a living reality that permeated every part of their being. That, my friends, is a powerful weapon that we must learn how to wield against the enemies of our souls, and of our children’s souls.

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(2) The second weapon we have is this: We have an opportunity to be “fathers” to lost, broken people. We can introduce them to the Father who loves them. We can mirror God’s “fathering” that he does for us so that they can see it. How God has shown himself to be a father to you, personally, in your unique situation, is something that you can reflect to hurting people around you.

That means that the more you get to know the love of God the Father, the better you will be able to share that love, that sense of having a good Father, with some fatherless child, who might be fourteen, or forty, or seventy-four. And as our church continues to transition, we will be coming face to face with more and more of the mess that is all around us in the lives of fatherless generations. We have two powerful weapons—and we need to be ready to use them.

[Slide 21]

*Transition to communion*

*[Worship team, if you would begin making your way to the platform . . . ;  
those who are helping to serve communion please join me in the front . . .]*

*Intro final song “The Blessing”*

*[Hear it/sing it as (1) God’s blessing over you and your family; (2) God’s  
blessing over our church; (3) God’s blessing over the fatherless generations  
around us, whom he wants to reach through us.]*

*Benediction /Blessing*

*[Lift your hearts to heaven, and your hands if you like . . . ]  
Invite people to receive prayer; mention membership*