



To what lengths would you go to win a \$100 million lottery? Think about how that much money would change your life, the life of your family, the lives of people you could help around the world. With this much money you could:

- » pay off all the Christmas bills.
- » buy the best seats to any sporting event in the world for the rest of your life.
- » buy whatever car, house, object you ever desired.
- » your family would be wealthy for generations.
- » dig wells to provide clean drinking water for villages in Africa; 25,000 people with clean drinking water because of you. That's the population of Belmont, for a mere fraction of your money.

Would you be willing to rig the lottery to ensure that you won? Or would you let fate direct your future?

In our passage of scripture today, Jacob is facing a similar question: What is he willing to do, not to win a \$100 million lottery, but to get God's blessing? This is a story filled with mystery, deception and one man receiving the amazing blessing of God. All of us long for God's blessing, too; His favor, possessions and benefits that come with having the God of the universe on your side. How do you get God's blessing? Today's scripture has four major characters—Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah—and 12 tribes of Israel.

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. Isaac said, "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death. Now then, get your equipment—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. 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" (Genesis 27:1–4).

There are two problems with what's going on here. First, Esau isn't supposed to be getting this blessing. God foretells that Jacob would get the blessing before he and Esau were born. *"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"* (Gen. 25:23). Esau sold his "birthright" to Jacob for a bowl of soup. And now Esau wants the blessing of God. He's playing a bit fast and loose here. You can divide these technically speaking. But whenever one was used, the other was assumed as well. The usage of "blessing" in Hebrews 12 and to

God indicate they are inseparable. Esau has already given up his birthright for a bowl of soup.

Second, the blessing wasn't supposed to be a private event, which appears to be Isaac's intention. He intends to give the blessing to his favorite son without letting anyone know. Rebekah overhears this conversation and doesn't like it one bit.

Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, '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' (verses 6–7).

Rebekah tells Jacob, "Go to your flock and bring me the best animals. I'll prepare some food, just like your dad likes it. Then he'll bless you instead of your brother." Jacob is concerned that dad will discover the plan. Isaac is blind but he has his other senses. Esau is so hairy. One touch from dad on Jacob's arm and the plan is over and a curse will be given instead of a blessing.

His mother said to him, "My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say; go and get them for me" (v. 13).

Look how far they are willing to go to get this blessing. Deception. Scheming. Potential cursing. Why? What's so great about this blessing? I'll answer this in this next section of the story, but for now, Jacob got the animals and delivered them to his mom. Rebekah made the tasty meal and then raids Esau's closet for his best clothes and gives them to Jacob to wear.

He went to his father and said, "My father." "Yes, my son," he answered. "Who is it?" 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." Isaac asked his son, "How did you find it so quickly, my son?" "The LORD your God gave me success," he replied. 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." 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." He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he proceeded to bless him. "Are you really my son Esau?" he asked. "I am," he replied. 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. Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come here, my son, and kiss me." 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. May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness— an abundance of grain and new wine. 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" (verses 18–29).

There are two bold face lies here. One lie was he falsely attributed his supposed success to God. In general a blessing meant "to give a valuable gift to another." Bestowed prosperity in fertile land or bestowed prosperity in fertility of life. The Blessing would be:

Heaven's dew – dew from easterly and northwesterly Mediterranean winds played a vital role in crop irrigation in this area.

Earth's richness – rain.

Grain and new wine – image of a banquet. The idea being that you are so financially prosperous that you can easily afford to host large banquets.

Nations serve you – National destiny and dominion is described. Political and military power.

Be lord over your brothers – the boss in the family.

May those who curse you be cursed – Jacob inherits Abraham's blessing and destiny from Genesis 12:3.

That's it. Jacob has succeeded. He has deceived his father and gotten the blessing. The ancient equivalent to winning the lottery. Esau returns from his hunt. He prepares a tasty meal for his dad, enters his tent and says,

"My father, please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing." His father Isaac asked him, "Who are you?" "I am your son," he answered, "your firstborn, Esau." 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!" 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!" But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing." 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?" 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?" Esau said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!" Then Esau wept aloud. His father

Isaac answered him, **"Your dwelling will be away from the earth's richness, away from the dew of heaven above. 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" (verses 31–40).**

This is gut wrenching, isn't it? While Jacob will get everything, Esau is left with nothing. A troubling question that emerges here is this: Why does it appear that this blessing is irrevocable? In their culture this was impossible. Once a blessing was given, it was given and nothing could undo it.

God is not boxed in here. God had already decided to bless Jacob instead of Esau before they were born, remember? God is choosing to bless a schemer. Perplexing. Esau is furious at his brother, and justly so. In his anger Esau threatens to kill Jacob after their father dies. For safety, Jacob is going to leave town. He's going to live with his uncle until things cool down.

As he's preparing to leave, he has one more encounter with his dad. Strange that Isaac shows no bitterness or animosity toward his son but instead reaffirms the blessing, this time making direct connection to the covenant God made with Abraham two generations ago.

"Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham" (Gen. 28:2–4).

Jacob is on his way with God's blessing and with his dad's blessing. This is a strange Bible story, isn't it? We've got deception, scheming, and the apparent villain receiving the blessing. Not what we'd expect from the Bible. Kind of makes you mad, doesn't it? What a jerk. He lies to his dad, cheats his brother, blasphemes God. And then, later in his life, Jacob becomes the father to the 12 tribes of Israel. This is too much. His behavior is inexcusable. God's seems to reward him.

Behaving deceitfully, even in an attempt to accomplish God's will, is not God's plan. Consequences will be suffered. Jacob has to leave home, without anything. That's ironic considering he just received the blessing. Jacob is deceived by Laban in an act of heavenly justice. Rebekah dies without seeing Jacob, her favorite son again, and her relationship with Esau is forever damaged.

After overhearing Isaac's instructions, Rebekah comes up with an alternate plan for Jacob to get the blessing instead. Isaac should not be giving the blessing to Esau, for sure. But Rebekah should not be resorting to deceptive measures to right the wrong. Two wrongs do not make a right. The fallout of this deception will endure for centuries.

The Bible instructs us be people of honesty and integrity. *"The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity"* (Proverbs 11:3). *"Righteousness guards the man of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner"* (Proverbs 13:6). God views integrity as more important than pragmatism. He will take care of the confusing details that might lead us to scheme. We should do the right thing and trust the outcome to him.

If scheming isn't the moral of this story, what is it? Why is Jacob blessed? God blesses Jacob on the merit of someone else, but who was it? Abraham or God?

God originally made a covenant promise to Abraham to make him into a nation. This would happen by blessing him and then his descendants. *"God says, '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'"* (Gen. 12:2). *"The Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land'"* (Gen. 12:7).

Now, look how this blessing was passed on to Isaac, for the sake of the promise made to Abraham. In Genesis 26:24 God, speaking to Isaac, says: *"I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you [Isaac] and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham."*

"For the sake of my servant Abraham." It's not that Abraham was such a good guy . . . It's that God made a promise to Abraham. And now God is going to keep on blessing Abraham's family because he made that promise. It's like an inheritance Jacob is receiving. His only qualification seems to be that his grandfather was Abraham.

God does not bless Jacob because he's done something to deserve it. Jacob does **nothing** to deserve God's blessing, yet it is given. In fact, his actions seem to disqualify him from a blessing from a holy God. I've been thinking about this and talking to God about it. I've asked God, why would you bless a guy like Jacob? Then God cautioned me to not be so zealous. Perhaps, God said, you're more like Jacob than you realize.

Let's talk about how this changes our lives today. I said at the beginning that we all want the blessing of God on our lives. What do we learn about that from this story? Just like Jacob was blessed on the merit of someone else, so are we. We are blessed on the merit of Jesus Christ. The blessing we experience occurs when a person accepts Jesus Christ as their Lord. When a person becomes a follower of Jesus Christ, their sinful nature is

exchanged with Jesus' sinless nature. That's when God gives us a valuable gift. *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him"* (John 3:17).

Just like Jacob, God doesn't bless us because we've done something to deserve it. The point of this story is: No one is beyond the reach of God's blessing. *"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one"* (Romans 3:10–12).

And in this horrible condition, God reveals his love, showing that we are never beyond his reach. God takes the first step. *" . . . God's kindness leads you toward repentance"* (Romans 2:4). Then we experience the blessing of God. No one is beyond his reach.

In the Old Testament, the blessing was to give a valuable gift to another—prosperity in fertile land and prosperity in fertility of life. In the New Testament, the blessing is still to give a valuable gift to another—prosperity in fertile land, a heavenly home. Mansion. Tangible Kingdom. And the fertility of this "land" is the most bountiful. Prosperity in fertility of life—in salvation we have eternal life, the ultimate form of fertility.

In the New Testament God's blessing is salvation, offered through Jesus Christ. Are you wondering what you need to do to get God's blessing? How far would you go to get God's blessing?

It's the best thing in the world to be on the receiving end of God's blessing. God pouring his love into you. God filling you with strength, peace, wisdom. God granting you a pardon for your sin. Look how this verse describes a person who has accepted the kindness of God. *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God"* (1 Peter 2:9).

Wow! That makes you feel good doesn't it? We're never beyond God's reach. God takes the first step toward us and blesses us, then makes us into his people. Let's just take a moment and savor in the wonder of that. *" . . . that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy"* (1 Peter 2:9–10).

Declare the praises of God. Make God famous. Spread His glory.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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