

The Older will Serve the Young

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[0:00] And I want to invite you this morning, if you have your own Bible with you, to open up to Genesis chapter 25.

! If you are using the Bibles that we have provided for you that are scattered around in the chairs, you can just turn to page 19 in those Bibles and you will find Genesis chapter 25. Where we will begin in the middle this morning. We will start in the middle of Genesis chapter 25 and work down through verse 28.

We have been for quite some time walking through the life of Abraham. And last week we saw Abraham's life come to a close in the first half of this great chapter.

And now we begin to look forward past Abraham into the lives of Abraham's son and his grandchildren. And the Lord is going to begin to teach us that his purposes did not end with Abraham, but his purposes continued through Abraham, on through Isaac, down through Jacob, and all the way down to Christ.

So in the passing on and the promises and the moving from one generation to the next is not just history for us, but there is good news that all of these things are moving toward and pointing us toward the hope that we have in Christ.

[1:28] So we're going to pick up in verse 12 this morning. And as I said, we'll move all the way down through verse 28. I want to invite you all in honor of God's word to stand as we read. Verse 12.

These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar, the Egyptian, Sarah's servant, bore to Abraham. These are the names of the sons of Ishmael named in order of their birth.

Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael. And Kedar, Abdel, Mibsam, Mishmah, Dumah, Massah, Hadad, Tima, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah.

These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names by their villages and by their encampments. Twelve princes according to their tribes. These are the years of the life of Ishmael, 137 years.

He breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people. They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria. He settled over against all his kinsmen.

[2:32] These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham fathered Isaac and Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan Aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife.

And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer and Rebekah, his wife, conceived. The children struggled together within her.

And she said, If it is thus, why is this happening to me? So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her, Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided.

The one shall be stronger than the other. The older shall serve the younger. When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak.

So they called his name Esau. Afterward, his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel. So his name was called Jacob. Isaac was 60 years old when she bore them.

[3 : 38] When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man dwelling in tents. Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game.

But Rebekah loved Jacob. Father, teach us even from these details of the descendants of Abraham. Teach us your ways and your character.

And help us to hope in who you are and in all that you have done for us in your son, Jesus Christ. We ask these things in Jesus name.

Amen. You guys can take a seat. You know, there have been a number of studies and even whole books written on the effects of birth order upon the mindsets, the personality of a person.

So most of us, though, don't need to read those studies. If you have multiple children or if you have siblings yourself, you're well aware of the different ways in which you view the world and you can see that there are certain similarities, commonalities, between oldest siblings and then between youngest siblings.

[4 : 54] And if there are middle siblings, they tend to share characteristics and sometimes even personality traits with those who are middle siblings in other families. Birth order does have some sort of effect.

It's not sort of an ironclad rule that will always apply in all circumstances. And there are many exceptions to those sort of rules, if you want to call them that. But we do recognize, we do realize that there are certain privileges that come along with being the firstborn at times.

You get to do everything first. And so that influences your outlook on life. You get to experience things before the other kids in your family. There are certain advantages to being the youngest, for sure.

You usually get treated with a little bit more tenderness than the others at times, or at least you get a little bit more freedom than they had when your older siblings are the same age as you are. We've seen that that's especially the case when there are three boys and then a girl who comes a few years later last.

There are definitely some privileges to being the youngest and being the only girl in the family. There's no doubt about that. But you know that by experience, or you can see that in others, that there are certain privileges that come with being at a certain place in the family.

[6 : 06] If you're the middle child, a lot of times you get away with more because nobody's paying as much attention as they are to the oldest and the youngest sometimes. And so sometimes you just have a little bit more natural freedom to just kind of do because everybody's worried about the little sibling.

The older sibling might be getting in trouble or might be experiencing new things. And so parents are having to pay attention to those kinds of things. So with every level, there are unique experiences that people have. Well, when we turn to the Bible, the thing that we notice is that the culture of the biblical days, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, placed a high sort of value upon being the oldest child in a family.

You were afforded a greater inheritance from your father if you were the oldest son. You had greater responsibilities, yes, but you also had more freedom and there were great expectations for your life to follow.

There were reasons to want to be the firstborn son in a family and reasons to envy those who were the firstborn sons in a family. Great privileges came along with that.

Blessing came with that in most families. Blessings would be passed on from father to son. Inheritances would be passed on from father to son. In fact, when we begin to read in the law of Moses in the Old Testament, there were some regulations sort of put on that so that the oldest son received a double portion.

[7 : 31] But that was a limitation because there were some folks in the cultures of the day that would give almost virtually everything to the oldest son and the younger siblings were left to sort of fend for themselves and hope that the oldest son would maybe show some kindness toward them and help them out.

So the Old Testament law sort of put some parameters on that. Yes, the oldest gets a double portion, but the others are guaranteed some amount of inheritance.

The culture of the biblical world highly prized and valued the role of the oldest born son, which causes us to really recognize or ought to cause us to recognize when God continually turns that on its head.

God is continually favoring the younger child over the one that the culture favors. God is continually choosing and setting His graces upon the younger, the unexpected, those that you would not think that He would choose out.

And there are some of the more well-known examples that you might think of, like King David, the youngest of seven brothers. And when God directs the prophet to go to Jesse, David's father, to choose a king from among his sons, he looks first at the oldest.

[8 : 50] That's what you would expect. And God says no. And he works his way down until finally He says, Do you have any other children? And it's as if David has almost been forgotten about. Oh yeah, there's our youngest.

He's taking care of the sheep out in the field. We just kind of assumed you didn't need to see him. Why would you bother? And yet God chooses David to be king. And Samuel the prophet anoints David, passing over all of David's older brothers.

Over and over God is doing that. That's not the first time that God does that in the Scriptures. God does that multiple times in the Scriptures. He chooses those that the world would not choose.

He turns things on their head. In fact, he does that very early in the book of Genesis. You of course have the infamous event of Adam and Eve's first children, Cain and Abel, where Cain kills Abel.

And yet Cain is still the oldest, and you might expect something to pass to him, and yet he is sent away. And the younger son, Seth, is the one to whom the promise passes.

[9 : 55] God had made a promise that there would be an offspring of the woman that would bring redemption, that would conquer the enemy, that would put things right again.

And that promise does not pass through Cain. It certainly cannot pass through Abel because he's no longer around. And it goes to the younger brother, Seth, and the promise passes through. So very, very early in the biblical story, we see the expectations of the biblical culture turned upon their head.

And that will continue as we move through. And in fact, I believe that that's what is being highlighted in the passage that we're looking at today. Now some of you might have thought, oh great, another stinking genealogy to start off this morning's sermon.

Because we've hit several of them while we've been going through Genesis. And most of the time, if you have one of those read the Bible in a year programs, those are the chapters you just kind of, you work your way through.

Those chapters and someone with the detailed laws, you just kind of push through. And a lot of times, we miss the point that is being made. But we don't only start this passage with this phrase that it pops up over and over in Genesis.

- [11:03] These are the generations of. But we get it two times. First in verse 12, these are the generations of Ishmael. And then again in verse 19, these are the generations of Isaac.

So two times we are told about generations in this passage. Now that particular phrase though is probably more significant than we might at first glance realize.

That phrase or some version of that phrase, these are the generations of, occurs at key moments throughout the book of Genesis. Most of the time, that phrase is introducing the next major part of the story of the book of Genesis.

So for instance, in Genesis chapter 1, you get the account of God creating all of the world. And then Genesis chapter 2 continues that in the first couple of verses until you arrive down.

If you want to turn back to Genesis chapter 2, you can see this for yourself. You arrive at what seems to be a strange phrase in verse 4. After the creation account, after God rests, we read, these are the generations.

- [12:18] And there's not a person mentioned. It just says, these are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. Introducing the next part of the story of Genesis.

First you have the creation of the universe, but now chapter 2 is going to begin to focus upon the unique creation of Adam and Eve, of humanity itself. And so we begin that section with this key phrase.

As you move through the story, you get that statement again. These are the generations of in chapter 5 verse 1. Then you get it in chapter 6 to introduce the story of Noah.

These are the generations of Noah in Genesis chapter 6 verse 9. So every time we start a major section of the book of Genesis, we get this phrase, these are the generations of.

In fact, if you move all the way forward to the end of chapter 11, you get in 11 verse 27, the beginning of Abraham's story. These are the generations of Terah.

- [13:19] That's Abraham's father. Because frequently what happens is we're told these are the generations of so and so, but the story that follows after that does not always focus upon that person.

And oftentimes the story focuses upon the child or the children of that person. So these are the generations of Terah introduces us to the story of Abraham. And we've not come across that phrase since then.

Everything since 11:27 has been all about Abraham. And yet now, we find that we are being introduced to a new section. And then sometimes this phrase, these are the generations of, not only begins a section, but it also ends a particular section of Genesis.

In other words, it's telling us, we started with this, now we're ending with sort of a summary of part of that family line. These are the generations of. And that's what's happening with Ishmael.

With the mention of Ishmael at the very end of the story of Abraham, Moses, who wrote the book of Genesis, is continuing to sort of tidy things up. He told us at the very beginning of chapter 25 about some other children that Abraham had that we knew nothing about up to that point.

- [14:29] He's just filling in some more details, tidying things up at the end of Abraham's life. Then the account of Abraham's death, and now this account of Ishmael's descendants.

Just sort of finishing up the story, putting some final details in there that readers may want to know and may need in order to sort of more fully understand what God did through the life of Abraham and now through his descendants.

So in a way, that statement, these are the generations of Ishmael, that paragraph is closing out the story of Abraham. But it's also creating for us a contrast with the next section.

It's really weird to have these are the generations of in a short little genealogy, and then these are the generations of in another person named, and then the story of that person's life begins.

It's strange until you realize that Moses is doing that for a reason. Moses, as he concludes the life of Abraham, highlights Ishmael, the oldest son who has been rejected by God, so that we might have our minds focused all the more on the wonder of God choosing Isaac who is introduced next.

[15:41] These are the generations of Ishmael, and his story ends as far as the biblical record is concerned. Now, these are the generations of Isaac, and his story begins in full force.

That's significant because the choosing of the younger in place of the older continues to be the theme as we move through the life of Isaac and Isaac's children.

What happens first, what happens at the very beginning of this account of the life of Isaac and the life of his family, is the exact same thing. We're told early on, we're told at the beginning that Abraham, in verse 19, Abraham fathered Isaac, and that Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean.

And then in verse 21, and Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife because she was barren. This should sound familiar to us. Sarah was barren, and God came along and miraculously allowed her to conceive at an old age.

And she conceived Isaac. Now Isaac's wife is barren, and Isaac intercedes on her behalf, and God answers that prayer, and she's able to conceive and now give birth.

[16:58] But something shocking is going to happen. She doesn't conceive one child. She conceives two children. Twins. And that doesn't increase her joy at being pregnant.

It makes her pregnancy all the more difficult. Take a look at how this is described. Verse 22. The children struggled together within her.

Now that phrase in and of itself can be translated in a number of ways, but it indicates a kind of an intense clashing of two sides. In fact, I've seen some commentators who render this as they smashed one another.

They smashed together. This is a language of violence happening. There's violence going on in her womb, so much so that she reaches a point of despair.

If it is thus, if this is how it's going to be, she says, why is this happening to me? Quite literally, then why am I even here? That's her question. If this is how it's going to be, if it's going to be this hard and this painful, why am I in this position?

[18:07] Why am I even alive? She's reaching a point of despair. So she's suffering greatly. The curse in the garden is all the more real to her.

That there would be pain in childbearing is true for her, but greater pain than usual. She's suffering greatly throughout this pregnancy, so much so that she's just thinking, why God?

Why do I have to endure this? Why am I even here if this is the way things are going to be? It's difficult. But that difficulty for her reveals God's purpose in all of these events.

Notice how the story continues. She goes to, and she prays. It says, so she went to inquire of the Lord. Verse 23, and the Lord said to her, two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided.

The one shall be stronger than the other. The older shall serve the younger. This is God's purpose. Just as God marked off Isaac as the one who was chosen over Ishmael, so He has already, before these children are even born, He has marked off Jacob as the one who was chosen rather than Esau, the older brother.

[19:28] This is God's purpose in all of this. This is God's plan in all of these things. The older will serve the younger. And the implications of that statement become more apparent to us as we move through the story, but we can already guess at them because of what we've read before in Genesis.

It's not just a matter of that the younger will be more powerful than the older or will be more wealthy than the older. It is, as we move through the story, that the covenant promises and the covenant blessings will go through the younger brother rather than the older just as it did with Ishmael and Isaac.

God rejected Ishmael and chose Isaac and now God rejects Esau and chooses Jacob before they are even born. Paul will go on to say in Romans 9, before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad, which means that God's selection of the younger over the older has nothing to do with what He sees in them.

In fact, I think that we could probably turn it on its head. I think that we could probably say not that God's choice of Jacob over Esau was based upon something that He saw in them that made them so different from one another.

No. But that I believe that God's choice of Jacob over Esau accounts for and explains the great differences between the two. It is not that one was better than the other or one was to be preferred over the other because of their differences and their differences are great.

[21:05] No. It is that their differences exist because God has ordained it to be this way. I think that's what Moses intends for us to see as he goes on to describe just how different these two boys are.

You see it even in their birth. They struggle together and they are different. Look at verse 24. When her days to give birth were completed behold there were twins in her womb.

The first came out red all his body like a hairy cloak so they named him Esau. Now it is unclear here whether or not his skin is red or his hair is red.

We don't know. The text is not clear on that but we do know that because of his hairiness they name him Esau. Now to be honest with you we don't have a clue what the name Esau means. We just don't know what it means.

It must be some way connected with the word for hairy that seems to be the implication but we have no clue what it really means. But then as you move through you see that Jacob is just the opposite. Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel so his name was called Jacob.

[22:12] Later in the text we learn that Jacob's skin is smooth he's not hairy. So when it comes to the point where he's going to deceive his father into thinking that he's Esau because his father can't see well enough to determine the difference he has to actually he has to put fake hair on his arms and he says I'm smooth skin how in the world am I going to fool him?

He's just put fake hair on his arms. They are completely opposite in almost every way imaginable. Look down at verse 27 these differences continue.

When the boys grew up Esau was a skillful hunter a man of the field while Jacob was a quiet man dwelling in tents. They're different and one is preferred by Isaac their father Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game the other by their mother but Rebekah loved Jacob they are different in every way and yet their differences do not cause God to choose one over the other.

if anything their differences would tend to point you in the direction of Esau being the chosen one. We skipped the explanation for Jacob's name a moment ago his name was called Jacob because he was holding on to Esau's heel.

Now literally the name Jacob does mean to grasp or to grab someone's heel so it makes sense that they would name him that but there is a play on words here in that the name Jacob also sounds very familiar to the word for to deceive or to trick and as we move through Jacob's life especially for the first half of his life we will find that that's exactly that is exactly who he is.

[23:58] He is a deceiver he is a trickster he is one who who plots and plans and schemes to get his way and he learns that from his mother as we will go on to see he learns that from his mother who prefers him she teaches him to be that way and that's who he is.

Indeed later on the language of to grab a person's heel is used to describe someone who is deceptive and deceitful this is who Jacob is and it's signified at the very beginning in their birth that even as they struggle in the womb and as they are born Jacob is seen to be the one who's always trying to get the upper hand and he'll do whatever he needs to do for that to happen.

There is nothing in Jacob that would cause God to choose him and there's nothing in Esau that would cause God to prefer Jacob over Esau.

They are both fallen sinful descendants of Adam just like you and I are and there's nothing that would stand out to us as we read through this story that would cause God to prefer Jacob over Esau.

So then why does he do it? Why is this God's way? Why is he continually doing these things? I think there are really two ways that we can answer that question and I think both of these things have very broad implications for how we think about our own salvation and how we think about the grace of God in our own lives.

[25:34] The first thing we might say is that it is clear from this passage as I've been saying that God's choice of Jacob over Esau has nothing to do with anything that Jacob does or anything that Jacob is.

There is nothing in him or about him that would commend him to God over his brother. Which is to say that God saves us and delivers us and rescues us.

He chooses us not on the basis of anything that we do or on the basis of who we are in comparison to other people. Now I say that because the New Testament confirms that conclusion that we're drawing from this particular passage.

I want you to open in your Bibles. I mentioned this. I quoted this a moment ago but I want you to see it for yourselves. Turn over to the New Testament to Romans chapter 9. Romans chapter 9 actually Paul actually sets side by side God's choice of Isaac over Ishmael with God's choice of Jacob over Esau.

In other words I think Paul as he has in mind Genesis chapter 25 is seeing the same thing that we are now seeing. Romans chapter 9 we can jump in in verse 10.

[26:53] And not only so but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man our forefather Isaac though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad in order that God's purpose of election might continue not because of works but because of him who calls she was told the older will serve the younger as it is written Jacob I loved but Esau I hated.

You notice the basis of God's choice? It's not anything in Jacob or anything in Esau. The whole point of God telling her before the children are born is that before they even do anything good or bad in their lives before they contribute in any direction God has already made a determination between them.

This is God's sovereign prerogative. this is what he does. This is what the scriptures tell us. Not because of works but because of him who calls.

In other words because this is what God wants to do in order that God's purpose of election might literally it might stand. God chooses Jacob over Esau.

God chooses the one that we would not expect him to choose so that we would never say it was because they were better. It was because they were so good.

[28:22] It's because they had done all of these things. No not because of works but so that we would ultimately say God did this because God desired to do this very thing.

We have a tendency even those of us who know that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. We still have this latent tendency within us to want to cling to something that we have done or something about ourselves that makes the difference between us and those outside of Christ.

As if somehow our salvation in some small measure rests upon our performance and if they had only done the things that we did and made the choices that we made and walked the path that we walked they would be where we are and yet the biblical viewpoint would say I would be where they are if God had not been gracious to me and called me and made me his own.

That's the biblical pattern. And our sinful nature clinging to us as it does even after we have trusted in Christ would try in some way to convince us that we have contributed some small measure to our standing with God and we have not in any way.

Which brings me to the second very important reason that God has done this. God has not only done this so that it would be clear that this is according to his choice and not our works or our doing but he has also done this so that he might ultimately receive all the glory and honor and praise.

[29:59] We notice that Paul mentioned this word called not because of works but because of him who calls. He also uses this same terminology in 1 Corinthians so if you'll just turn over a few pages in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 we see the same themes being brought up here.

We see some of the same language of calling and then we're going to see Paul pushing us ahead to look at the reason why is God doing these things?

Why is he doing it? Jump in to the middle with verse 23. Paul says we preach Christ crucified. That's what we preach. Jesus has been crucified.

He has died for sins. That's what we preach he says. Unfortunately that message he describes as a stumbling walk to Jews and folly to Gentiles.

The Jews it's a stumbling walk to them because they can't conceive of the Christ of the Messiah dying a cursed death on a tree. It's a stumbling walk to them.

[31:02] It doesn't make sense to them. And to the Gentiles it's foolishness. The Greeks look at this as foolishness. They're the ones with the great philosophers. They're the ones with the higher thinking.

And they look at this idea of a crucified God as ridiculous. No. That's what we do to our criminals. I'll not worship someone like that.

Paul says nevertheless we preach Christ crucified. It is the gospel message. Jews can't believe it. It's a stumbling walk. Gentiles can't believe it.

It's foolishness to them. Verse 24. But to those who are called both Jews and Greeks Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

It says the gospel is incomprehensible to Jews and Gentiles. They don't get it. They reject it.

[32:00] And yet whether Jew or Gentile for those who are called it is not a stumbling block and it is not foolishness. It is the very power of God for salvation for them.

God transforms the way they think and the way they feel and the way they perceive the cross of Christ. Those who are called. Now move down to verse 26 where this will bring us to our main point and tie us back to the theme of the end of Genesis 25.

He says consider your calling brothers brothers. Now he speaks to those who are called. Perhaps the cross was once foolishness to them or a stumbling block to them but God called them and they saw it for what it was and now he says now think about that reality.

Think about the fact that God called you brothers. Now not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. You weren't wise. You Greeks you weren't the wisest of the Greeks.

You weren't the great thinkers. Nobody will remember your name. Nobody will study your works that you wrote. You weren't the wise philosopher. No you weren't wise by worldly standards.

[33 : 17] Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. In other words there was there was nothing about your family history to commend you to God.

There was nothing about who you are or who your ancestors were that would bring you to God's attention. Nothing at all. Nothing. No.

You have nothing to cling to. But on the other side verse 27 but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

God chose what is low and despised in the world even the things that are not to bring to nothing things that are. That's what God did between Isaac and Ishmael he chose the younger son.

Between Jacob and Esau he chose the younger son. And even as we move through their lives at least for the first half of their lives there are more things about Esau that you would think would make him stand out to be the hero than there are about Jacob.

[34 : 20] And yet God chooses the weak. He chooses the low and the despised in the world. And here's why verse 29. So that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

God's purpose in calling and in saving those that we would never expect him to call and save is so that all honor and glory and praise would go to him and not to us.

He will not leave it to our works for us to claim that we have done good things to gain God's attention and his good favor nor will he leave it to our character or to our family history or to our social status so that we can claim any of those as reasons that we can stand in God's presence.

It's not because of any of those things. It's not because you were raised in church. It's not because you know a lot about the Bible. It's not because you do a good job of raising your children well to know the scriptures and to be in church.

It's not because of any of those things. But it's because of him who calls so that no one would boast in their own works, so that no one would boast in their own status or background, but so that all boasting and all praise would be directed toward God himself.

[35 : 52] this is in fact part of the reason that God saves us through a crucified Savior. Foolishness to the world. Silliness to others.

I've seen some describe the death of Christ and Christ taking upon himself the judgment that we deserve as cosmic child abuse. Berating the gospel itself.

It's foolishness to the world. This doesn't make sense. this is what God does. He comes in weakness. He serves in weakness.

He dies in weakness so that he might save those who live and dwell in weakness. And all honor and glory and praise goes to him.

Which means that if you have nothing to hold out and say, accept me because of this. If you view and estimate yourself to be worthless, that's okay because those are the kind of people that God likes to save.

[36 : 59] Those are the kinds of people that God likes to work powerfully through because all honor and glory and praise goes to him. It means that if you feel as if you've lost hope for a loved one and think, they are too far gone, they have done too many things, they have run too far.

Those who are too far to reach are the ones that God delights the reach because only his arm is long enough. He receives all honor and glory and praise.

We need to begin to conceive and understanding our own calling and election and salvation in such a way that God alone deserves the praise.

Let's pray. for