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Sermon Notes

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Two Manner of People

Genesis 25

Introduction: A Divided Nation

Experts say we live in a deeply divided nation... they speak of “Red states” and Blue states”... after the last Presidential election, some members of the media were willing to acknowledge that religious and moral issues were at the core of the motives for many of the votes cast... moral issues like abortion, fetal stem cell research, gay marriage showed up high on post-election polls in key states

Some say the division is so deep it can never be repaired... that essentially we look at the world differently, that there are substantial world-views so diametrically opposed that we can scarcely co-exist in America

And some say this is a new phenomenon

However, almost four thousand years ago, two preborn infants shared the same tiny space... the womb of their mother. They struggled together, fighting and pushing and shoving... motion opposing motion, little knowing that their struggle represented forever a timeless struggle

This struggle would be far more vital and of far more eternal consequence than the outcome of one political contest in one nation on earth. This struggle would be over the core issue of the existence and promises of God.

They would grow to be men who looked at life radically differently: one would embrace and love the physical world as though it was all there is. He would live for a good bowl of soup, an exciting hunt, the smell of the fields in the early morning, the love of a beautiful woman at night. He was a sinner unconcerned with a savior. His name was Esau.

The other would live a reflective life, musing on how to take cleverest advantage of whatever situation faced him; he would meditate on the promises made to His father Isaac and grandfather Abraham, and he would come to cherish them as unspeakably precious. He would suffer greatly as a result of his own conniving cleverness, he would wrestle against God and win, he would limp the rest of his life from the struggle. He was a sinner desperate for a savior and He trusted Him. His name was Jacob.

Pre-born Jacob and pre-born Esau... inside Rebekah's small womb... struggled against each other... as generations of believers and unbelievers have done in this small planet God created for His glory so long ago. We share the same roads, the same supermarkets, the same elevators. We attend the same sporting events, cheer for the same teams, read the same newspapers. We visit the same national parks, breathe the same air, react the same way to a sudden cloudburst. But we see everything of value radically differently.

This is the story of Genesis 25... we are "Two manner of people" in the KJV translation of verse 23

vs. 23 *And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated*

I. Abraham's Lasting Legacy: The Father of Many Nations

A. The Final Chapter of Abraham's Earthly Life

B. A Lasting Legacy of Two Sorts

1. Abraham's Physical Legacy: "The Father of Many Nations"

2. Abraham's Spiritual Legacy

a timeless example of a faith-filled life

a faith-filled son (Isaac) to carry on God's purposes

all the unfulfilled promises God had made to him

Genesis 12:3 "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

ultimately... Jesus Christ Himself, the Savior of the World

Matthew 1:1 A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham

C. Significance of this Chapter: How These Two Legacies Fit Together

Not all of Abraham's physical descendants cherish the promises God made to their father

Not all of Abraham's physical descendants have faith

BUT all of Abraham's physical descendants are blessed in this life in some way

All of Abraham's physical descendants experience the kindness of God the creator

All of Abraham's physical descendants sin and stand in danger of the wrath of God

On the one hand: Isaac... on the other hand, Ishmael

On the one hand: Jacob... on the other hand, Esau

On the one hand... Isaac and Jacob were sinners who knew God, believed Him, and cherished and trusted in the promises made to their father Abraham... they lived for a place in the eternal city of God

On the other hand... Ishmael and Esau were sinners who did not know God, did not trust in Him, despised the promises made to their father Abraham... they lived for earthly pleasures, earthly blessings, earthly stuff!

YET all were descendants of Abraham... and they had to co-exist in God's physical world for a while

D. Overview of the Chapter

Vs. 1-6: The Rest of Abraham's Family: Keturah and Her Sons

Vs. 7-10: The Death and Burial of Abraham

Vs. 11: God's Blessing on Isaac

Vs. 12-18: God's Blessings on Ishmael

Vs. 19-34: The Birth and Development of Jacob and Esau

(19-21) Rebekah's barrenness and Isaac's effective prayer

(22-23) Rebekah's suffering and God's prophetic answer

(24-26) Jacob and Esau born and described

(27-28) Jacob and Esau developed and described

(29-34) The Most Expensive Bowl of Stew in History

II. Abraham's Fleshly Children

A. God's Faithfulness to His Promise

Genesis 17:5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.

1. This was a prophecy which begins to come true even in this chapter

2. Patriarchs of many different nations mentioned in this chapter
3. God lavished many blessings on Abraham and showed His faithfulness to His Promise
4. Yet in the midst of it, God clearly identified which of Abraham's many sons was alone the child of promise

Genesis 25:5 Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac.

5. Key Biblical point essential to this sermon:

Romans 9:6-8 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ⁸ In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

B. Keturah and Her Sons

1. The problem of Keturah
 - a. who was Keturah?
 - i) verse 1: "wife"

vs. 1 Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah.

- ii) 1 Chronicles: "concubine"

1 Chronicles 1:32 The sons born to Keturah, Abraham's concubine: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. The sons of Jokshan: Sheba and Dedan.

- b. disturbing thought... Abraham's wife AFTER Sarah???
- c. even more disturbing thought: I thought Isaac was a miracle baby on both sides of his parents

Romans 4:17-21 As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed-- the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. ¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead-- since he was about a hundred years old-- and that Sarah's womb was also dead. ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

Was Abraham's body "as good as dead"? If so, how was he able to father six more sons by Keturah?

Two possible answers: 1) Abraham married Keturah before Isaac was born, and it's only being reported here, now... or, 2) God completely restored Abraham's body when he was one hundred, enabling him to father many more children

Henry Morris: "When God heals, he heals completely, restoring the injured member or diseased organ back to full soundness again. In order to father a son in his old age, Abraham's reproductive system had to be rejuvenated. The one-hundred-year-old man became a man of thirty or forty again, in that respect at least."

2. Who were Abraham's sons by Keturah?

Answer: **six more nations**, fleshly descendants of Abraham!!!

Genesis 25:2 She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah.

Example: Midian... the Midianites, from whom came Jethro, the priest of Midian who took Moses in when he was fleeing from Pharaoh, and who became Moses' father-in-law... BUT it was also the Midianites who later attacked the Israelites as they were travelling to the Promised Land and whom Gideon defeated in the book of Judges... they became bitter enemies of Israel

Clear lesson: not all who are descended physically from Abraham are Abraham's spiritual offspring... children of God! Some became bitter enemies of the people of God!

C. Ishmael and His Sons

1. We've already met Ishmael in Genesis 16
2. Remember at that time that his mother Hagar was told he would be a wild donkey of a man and his hand would be against everyone
3. Remember Abraham's prayer for Ishmael in Genesis 17

Genesis 17:18-21 And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!"¹⁹ Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.²⁰ And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation.²¹ But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year."

4. Descendants of Ishmael also very significant in the Bible

Ishmaelites lived in Arabia and moved in caravans through the desert

Ishmaelites bought Joseph from his hateful brothers and sold him as a slave to the Egyptians

Nebaioth, Kedar, Tema, Dedan all mentioned later in Isaiah and other places as desert-dwelling tribes in Arabia

HOWEVER... like sons of Keturah, they were usually seen as enemies of the people of God... with one key exception, which I will mention at the end of this sermon

D. Esau

1. Twin son of Isaac and Rebekah
2. Ultimately became the paradigm example of a faithless unbeliever
3. Physically descended from Abraham... YET he despised the promises God had made to Abraham

Summary: Keturah's sons, Ishmael's sons, and Esau ALL descended physically from Abraham... children according to the flesh. BUT they are all examples of pagan nations... of unbelievers

Remember the lesson from Romans:

Romans 9:8 it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

III. Abraham's Spiritual Children

Called the "children of the promise"... they represent the elect, the saved, the believers, the Lord's people

Galatians 3: Child of the Slave woman vs. Child of the Free Woman

A. Isaac: Faith-filled Inheritor Blessed by the Lord

1. The miracle son... the paradigm of the child of God
2. He is the heir of all Abraham's possessions

Genesis 25:5-6 Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. ⁶ But while he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east.

3. Much more significantly he is the heir of the promises God made to Abraham... most of which had still not been fulfilled

Romans 4:13 Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

Amazing: "heir of the world"...

4. Isaac was especially heir of a lifestyle of faith, which put its ultimate stock in the future promises of God

- a. lifestyle of faith = trusting in God and turning to God to solve life problems

Genesis 25:21 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.

NOTE: This is much superior to what Abraham did when he took Sarah's advice and slept with Hagar, her maid

It displays the characteristic of the children of God... meeting life's trial with prayer and not with self-confident action or sinful response

See it also in Rebekah's prayer

Genesis 25:22 The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.

- b. especially, Isaac was heir of a general outlook of faith that saw the whole world in terms of God and his promises to Abraham

Hebrews 11:9-16 By faith [Abraham] made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ... ¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country-- a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

5. For all of this, Isaac was said to be blessed by the Lord

Genesis 25:11 After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Beer Lahai Roi.

B. Jacob: Faith-filled Conniver Blessed by the Lord

1. Just like Isaac, Jacob would be heir of the same lifestyle of faith and of the promises made to Abraham
2. Unlike Isaac, Jacob was a conniver, a con-man who sought to make the promises come true through his own efforts, schemes and machinations
3. Ultimately, like Isaac, Jacob cherished the God of his father Abraham, and cherished and trusted in the promises of God

IV. What is Common: Sinfulness, Earthly Blessings and Pain

Illus. John F. Kennedy's Commencement Address at American University on June 10th, 1963... at the height of the Cold War, just eight months removed from the Cuban Missile Crisis, dealing with the fear that Americans had of the Soviet Union

“For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal.”

So also, Abraham's spiritual children and Abraham's fleshly children also share some key common experiences

A. Both Experience Birth

1. Jacob and Esau share the same tiny space inside their mother's womb
2. Both of them have the same shocking experience of physical birth... the flash of light, the loud sounds, the pain, the first breaths
3. This experience symbolizes their shared physical lives... bodily lives with physical needs... air, water, food, warmth, protection, love, parenting, education

B. Both Face Death

1. At the other end of the lifespan waits the specter of death FOR EVERYONE
2. Most obvious point: Abraham died

Genesis 25:7-8 Altogether, Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸ Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people.

- a. Abraham called God's friend... walked with God faithfully
- b. YET he died

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death

Hebrews 9:27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment

No man is exempt from the humiliation and suffering of death... it is a universal death penalty under Adam

HOWEVER... his death was gentle, perhaps a reward for Abraham's faithfulness

Genesis 25:7-8 Altogether, Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸ Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people.

Psalms 116:15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.

3. Both Isaac and Ishmael shared in the experience of standing over their father's dead body at the tomb

Something terrifying about burying your father... as the next generation, you now step up into the role he occupied... the world gets scary, the time for maturity has come. It is now Isaac's turn to carry the banner of Redemptive History... it is now for both Isaac and Ishmael to contemplate their own deaths

The burial place: Machpelah, the small piece of the Promised Land that Abraham bought for Sarah's tomb

Death comes to everyone, believer and non-believer

C. Both Enjoy Earthly Blessings

1. Ishmael enjoyed the blessings of twelve sons... the richness of family life
2. Isaac enjoyed the joy of a wonderful marriage
3. Both of them enjoyed the pleasures of spectacular desert sunsets and cool spring rains
4. Esau loved a good stew... but it was Jacob that made it... they had this in common, they both enjoyed good food
5. God's common grace blessings He lavishes freely on believer and unbeliever alike

Matthew 5:45 your Father in heaven ... causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

The five senses are saturated day after day by the goodness of God, and He gives His gifts freely whether the people who receive them ever acknowledge God or not

- The rich flavor of roasted game
- The sweet fragrance of a rose
- The laughter of children playing
- The warmth of the sun on your face
- The softness of a wool blanket
- The joy of seeing your wife's smile or your father's strong hug
- The wonder of a line of marching ants
- The majesty of a soaring eagle riding on the thermals

- The memories of the funny things your children did when they were young
- The happy anticipation of good times with friends

God lavishes earthly blessing on the elect and non-elect, on the righteous and the unrighteous alike

D. Both Experience Earthly Pain

1. So also both experience earthly pain and suffering
2. Both elect and non-elect have to bury loved ones and grieve their loss, as did Isaac and Ishmael
3. Both elect and non-elect have to struggle with family conflict as Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Esau all experienced
4. Both elect and non-elect have physical pain, illnesses, bodily weariness, fatigue
5. Both elect and non-elect have great disappointments and plans that go awry

E. Both Are Sinful and Need a Savior

1. Most significantly, both elect and non-elect are sinful and in need of a savior
2. Esau was a sinner: he had very little interest in spiritual things, seemingly no walk with God whatsoever... he was a good old boy who loved a good hunt, and a bowl of stew and the smell of the field; he had pride and anger and lust and laziness and selfishness and covetousness; he twisted the truth and exaggerated and gossiped and slandered... more than anything, he lived a life independent of God
3. Jacob was a sinner: he cold-heartedly took advantage of his famished brother and he swindled his brother out of his birthright; later he would lie to his blind father's face at the time of blessings; Jacob saw the value of the promises of God, but sinfully sought to bring them about by his own conniving lying ways; and like Esau his heart was sinful as are all human hearts; he had pride and anger and lust and laziness and selfishness and covetousness; he twisted the truth and exaggerated and gossiped and slandered
4. Most common spiritual connection between both the elect and non-elect: BOTH HAVE NO CLAIM ON GOD, both deserve eternal condemnation, would have no possible standing before God apart from a savior

Romans 3:10-12 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Romans 11:32 For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

V. What is Different: God's Electing Purpose and People's Saving Faith

A. God's Electing Purpose: "Before the Twins Were Born..."

1. The central difference between Jacob and Esau was the purpose of God in election
2. So says Paul in Romans 9

Romans 9:10-13 Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-- in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

NOTE THE KEY PHRASE: in order that God's purpose in election might stand

3. Paul's proof: God's statement to Rebekah before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad
4. God has a purpose in election... and in the end, that is the ultimate difference between Jacob and Esau

B. Faith and Faithlessness: Jacob and Esau

1. The central lesson of the account of Jacob and the stew

Genesis 25:29 - 34 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.

2. The birthright represented being heir of the promises of God to Abraham and Isaac... Esau DESPISED it

Hebrew word means he treated it with contempt; thought it a trivial, light, meaningless thing

1 Samuel 2:30 But now the LORD declares: 'Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained.

To despise God's promise is to despise God Himself... that was Esau

3. All Esau cared about was his stomach... he lived a godless, faithless life

Hebrews 12:16-17 *See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. ¹⁷ Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.*

4. Jacob was a man of faith in this one regard: he cherished, valued, and trusted in the promises of God... his sinfulness came in how he went about by his own conniving means to accomplish God's ends
5. Esau cared NOTHING for the promises made to Abraham and Isaac
6. The basic disposition of soul that differed from Jacob and Esau was this: FAITH

VI. Key Lesson: Your Earthly Father Does Not Determine Your Eternal Destiny

A. Not All Abraham's Physical Descendants Are Accepted by God

1. Just because Abraham is your father doesn't guarantee you will be saved
2. Jews had to wrestle with this issue in a major way... it is the huge theme Paul deals with in Romans 9-11

B. On the Other Hand: Not All Ishmael's and Esau's Descendants Are Rejected by God!!!

Isaiah 42:10-12 *Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, you islands, and all who live in them. ¹¹ Let the desert and its towns raise their voices; let the settlements where Kedar lives rejoice. Let the people of Sela sing for joy; let them shout from the mountaintops. ¹² Let them give glory to the LORD and proclaim his praise in the islands.*

Kedar was Ishmael's second-born; Sela was a city in Edom, descendants of Esau!!

Isaiah is prophesying a time when there will be heartfelt worship of the true and living God from physical descendants of Ismael and Esau

Isaiah 60:7 *All Kedar's flocks will be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth will serve you; they will be accepted as offerings on my altar, and I will adorn my glorious temple.*

Nebaioth was Ismael's first-born, and Kedar his second; these are desert-dwelling, Arabian tribes now

- C. First Essential Issue: God's Purpose in Election
- D. Secondary Essential Issue: Hearing God's Promises with Faith
- E. Ultimate End: God's Glory in the Salvation of Elect from Every Nation

Revelation 7:9-10 *After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."*

VII. Application: Living in a Mixed World

1. Accept the simple fact: Two manners of people live in this world... the saved and the unsaved, the elect and the non-elect
2. Understand what we share in common with the unsaved: we all share the joys and sorrows of physical life on earth... from birth to death and everything in between
3. Expect problems from living in a mixed world... sharing elevators and elections with unbelievers is a challenge; America as a whole will never share our Christian worldview
4. Humbly accept the simple fact: both elect and non-elect share wickedness and sin at the heart
5. Humbly acknowledge, in some significant ways unsaved people may excel beyond saved in key virtues: some Hindus may be more generous and compassionate on the poor than some Christians; some Muslims may be far more zealous and willing to die than some Christians; some atheists may be better thinkers or harder workers than Christians
6. YET: faith in Christ alone saves souls... it is not compassion for the poor or a zealous willingness to die or good thinking and hard work that washes away sin; nothing but simple faith in the promises of God as fulfilled in Christ saves our sinful souls
7. Surrounded by Esaus: GRIEVE FOR THEM

We are surrounded by people like Esau who live for an exciting sporting event, or a good meal, or a beautiful pagan wife, or a fun time... that is the American dream gone bad, and it has eternal consequences

Philippians 3:18-21 *For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

8. Know that God has power to save even the most wretched Esau-looking person by the gospel of Jesus Christ... so never give up on someone living for earthly pleasure... but warn them of their danger
9. Resolve not to live like Esau: a life of earthly passions, living for a good bowl of stew or an exciting sporting event, or a beautiful pagan wife or a good time

10. Make faith in the promises of God through Christ the center of your being
11. Hunger and thirst for the day when Christ's Kingdom will come and His will will be done on earth as it is in heaven; then all the godless will be rooted out and perfect unity will reign

Matthew 13:41-43 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.