

It's not what you know, it's who you know.  
A common phrase. True in many cases. The same could be said for the Bible, especially the Old Testament. Have you ever read children's books about the Bible - either you read one or maybe you read one to a child? Most of them have titles like "Jacob and the Coat of Many Colors" or "The Story of Moses". Wisely, publishers have taken the main, well known stories in the Old Testament, added pictures and made them into stories about the important *people* of the Bible rather than just the events. Like these I bought for my kids when they were young.

Even for us, as I considered how to offer a sermon series as an introduction of the Old Testament, my first thought was - focus on the main people. Since we're only doing this for 7 weeks and there are many important people in the Old Testament, for this sermon I'm combining three of those people - Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. All found in the book of ..... Genesis. Because the book of Exodus introduces us to .... - yes, Moses - another very important person in Biblical history.

The sermons in this series build upon each other, so if you weren't able to hear the 1st or 2nd sermons, I encourage you to either go back and listen on our Youtube channel or find the print transcript on our church website under "Sundays". God made his very first covenant -which is an unconditional promise - with Noah in Genesis chapter 9, then Genesis 15 God made his 2nd covenant or promise with Abraham (originally known as Abram). We learned last week that from the beginning God laid down Godself for us - in making his promise, his covenant - in order to seal the deal of hope and a future. In Genesis 15 - **HE** was the **ONLY** one to walk between the sacrificial sign of vow making. Instead of two friends pricking their fingers and shaking on a blood pact, in a sense it was like only God letting his blood and holding it up to say - I promise by my own blood, which is greater than anything else. If this makes you curious and you don't know this part of the Bible - go back and read Genesis 15.

As I said, God made his 2nd covenant or promise with Abraham - who was the father of Isaac. Just like we recognize many epic stories - like the

night Paul Revere raced through Lexington to warn Samuel Adams and John Hancock that the British were coming as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote - "One if by land and two if by sea". You probably know the name Isaac, because he was the one Abraham took to the mountain top to sacrifice to God, but in the end God wound up providing a ram instead and he was saved. That's a difficult story - God putting Abraham to the test to give up his son, but it's memorable and makes us think, of course, about Jesus and God giving up his only Son - though for Jesus there was no substitute. There is no substitute for Jesus.

The story about Isaac almost being sacrificed describes an event in Isaac's life, but it's really about Abraham and testing Abraham's faith. So we'll move on to learn more about Isaac.

Isaac's mom was named Sarah. God promised Abraham that he would be a father of many nations, but Abraham's wife, Sarah wasn't able to have children, until God provided a miraculous conception later in her life.

We just celebrated Mother's Day last Sunday. This past week as I talked with people here at church we commented that couples seem to be having children later in life these days. Many couples finish college, find a good job and secure a good home before having their first child, which many times is in their 30s or early 40s. Compared to couples having children in their 20s just a few generations ago, this seems later in life.

However, Sarah was in her 90s when she had Isaac. Sadly, she was 127 when she died, which meant Isaac lost his mother in his thirties. It's interesting, because soon after that a marriage was arranged for Isaac. In those days arranged marriages were very common. Genesis says Isaac was 40 years old when he married a woman named Rebekah. It's written in Genesis 14:67, "Rebekah became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death." To me this speaks of the closeness between Isaac and his mother, which I can completely understand if Sarah had Isaac so late in life and he was her only child.

There is not much to Isaac's story except that through him God confirms his oath to Abraham that his descendents will be as numerous as the stars in

the sky. Which provides another miracle opportunity by God, because it turned out that Rebekah wasn't able to have children either. Genesis 25:21 says, "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."

My personal story is that I also prayed fervently to God to be able to have children. I was close to 30 when I was ready and as many women experience, I was anxious that I wouldn't be able to have any children - just general anxiety as often happens for women I think when we first begin trying. I was a pastor at Chula Vista 1st UMC at the time and two of the many faithful women there - Barbara Eveland and Inez Scott - we met weekly for months just to pray for one another. It was so precious. We prayed for many things, but one of my prayer requests was to be able to have children and for patience to wait for God's good timing of that possibility.

The waiting was so hard and the monthly disappointments were even more difficult - as many of you know. But for me, after a lot of prayer, it turned out I was able to bear children - and not only were we blessed with an amazing boy, Drew - who is actually here worshiping with us this morning - visiting from Colorado for a few days - but we also were able to have an amazing girl, Mara, three years after Drew. Though I absolutely love being your pastor and being the wife of Mark, being the mother of Drew and Mara makes EVERYTHING else pale in comparison.

So Isaac might not have done much, but his role in fathering Jacob, made all the difference in the genealogy leading to Christ.

Though Jacob is the one named in the first chapter of Matthew in the genealogy of Jesus, Jacob also had a twin named Esau. If you're able and willing please look with me at Genesis 25 starting at verse 22 to hear more about that story.

[Read Genesis 25:22-28]

What a perfect setup for a great story, right? "Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob"

You can tell there is a storytelling payoff later that comes from this earlier setup, namely, that Rebekah, who loved Jacob more, conspired with

Jacob to trick Isaac and Esau. You see - Esau & Jacob were twins, but Esau was born first. That meant when it came time for the inheritance after Isaac's death, Esau had the birthright - he would get everything. But when the time came, Jacob and Rebekah tricked Isaac into thinking he was giving his blessing to Esau, when it was really Jacob instead. Esau loses his inheritance to Jacob and when he realizes it he gets REALLY mad and vows to kill Jacob. Does that remind you of any other sibling stories in the Old Testament? One sibling getting so mad at another that they kill them?

But that's just an old testament thing, right? That sort of thing never happens in modern day - siblings or people getting so mad at each other for various reasons that we hurt each other. That's never happened in your life, right? Or does that bring to mind your own story - how either you were harmed or possibly you harmed another?

This story of Jacob tricking Esau, yet still carrying the blessing of God, for me, is a teaching that God's ending is very different than the ending we expect or fear. I can think of so many examples just from this past week as I've spoken & prayed with many of you about your troubles in life - that as we move through this present darkness - as Psalm 57 calls them "destroying storms" - we don't know how things are going to end. We just don't know. Of course that's the difference between us and God. We can't see the future. Though I believe every person helps define the future with their choices and we have free will in life, we don't know what the end will be. I believe God desires for us and for all people, the best ending, which is always possible by God's grace, because of his work on the cross through Jesus, which changed the whole trajectory of time. Through Faith in Jesus, by Grace, in every way - salvation, new life and love are all totally attainable. But we lose sight of that. As the phrase goes - discouragement is Satan's most powerful tool.

Which leads us to Joseph - Jacob's 11th son - one of the most positive, hopeful and strong patriarchs in the Bible. If there was ever a story of bad things turned for good, this is it. Once again, most of you know the name and story of Joseph and his coat of many colors. It could be because this story was made into a famous Broadway

musical in 1982 “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat” - lyrics by Tim Rice and music by Andrew Lloyd Webber. Anyone seen this musical in person? Maybe the movie version which came out in 1999?

As the lyrics say from the song, “Go, Go Joseph” in that musical - “Joseph’s luck was really out - his spirit and his fortune low. Alone he sat, alone he thought of happy times he used to know - Hey dreamer, don’t be so upset - Hey Joseph - you’re not beaten yet. Go, Go Joseph - you know what they say. Hang on now Joseph, you’ll make it someday. Don’t give up Joseph, fight ‘til you drop. We’ve read the book and you come out on top.

It’s true - in the story of Joseph - even though he angers his brothers so that they sell him as a slave, he winds up as the second-in-command to the Pharaoh in Egypt. Joseph wisely stores the grain of Egypt and when there is a famine, his brothers come begging for food from him. But does he rub it in their faces? Nope. They don’t recognize him so he reveals who he is. Those who are able and willing, look with me at Genesis chapter 45 starting at verse 1.

[Read Genesis 45:1-8]

As you can see - today’s sermon has skipped from Genesis 25 to 45 and there are many more rich descriptions and smaller stories within this bigger one that I encourage you to go read on your own this week. This portion of the Old Testament finishes at chapter 50 and these verses 19 thru 21 of chapter 50 end it well:

“But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid, Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children. And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.”

This is a great place to end our journey today through the Old Testament. Joseph’s whole family stays in Egypt with him where he takes care of them for years and years. Next week we’ll pick up the story from here as we enter into Exodus and walk with Moses toward the promised land.