

Foolish Plans: Divine Purposes in the Midst of Human Messes

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[Gen. 27:11-17]

A Failed Plan – Scott’s South Pole Expedition ¹

In the early 1900’s explorers from many countries were competing in the exploration of Antarctica and the desire to be the first to reach the South Pole. In 1910, Captain Robert Falcon Scott of the British Navy, set off on the Terra Nova Expedition with the aim of reaching the South Pole before anyone else. Scott reached the Pole on 17th January 1912, only to find that he had been beaten there by the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen just a month earlier.

However, the Terra Nova expedition is probably more well-known than because none of the five explorers who made it to the pole returned to England safely.

In fact, most historians and researchers believe that because of poor planning and foolish decisions, the expedition was doomed to fail

- **Scott had an aversion toward the use of dogs**
- **Instead, Scott relied on ponies**
- **Unproven technology**
- **The man who designed the motorized sledges did not go on the expedition**
- **Hard physical labor**
- **Over-crewed and underfed**
- **Only one navigator**
- **Scott's men were not properly trained on skis**

Because of poor and foolish plans, this expedition was doomed to fail even before it started.

However the same can’t be said about God’s elect.

Even though we often plan poorly and foolishly, God is still gracious to His beloved.

KB last week, “Yahweh is still in the fight with Isaac and his broken, messy, scheming family, and we will see today that God always stays in the fight, working to accomplish His divine purposes in the lives of His people.”

In the text this morning we want to look at three ways this family is creating a mess of the situation.

- Their foolish plan
- Passive man
- Misguided affections

¹ Debenham, Frank, *In The Antarctic; Stories Of Scott's Last Expedition*

Passing on the blessing should have been a joyous family celebration but Isaac wants to have the meal and blessing in secret behind closed doors. Isaac's choice of Esau over Jacob is a carnal and sensual decision being made, symbolic of his physical blindness that will not be approved or accepted by the family.

Isaac wants to give the blessing and birthright to his son Esau in a private blessing ceremony.

Esau is the oldest son, and the oldest son usually became the head of the family.

He would be the one who carries on the family traditions. He would speak for the family and make decisions for the family, he becomes the leader, spokesman and head...

To avoid any criticism and conflict with his wife Isaac tries to do God's business privately.

This is why Isaac asks for the hunt and the meal in private; he wants to bless Esau in secret ...

One commentator I read said that "We can often judge whether an action is right or wrong by our willingness to lay it open to public scrutiny."

So Isaac is planning this meal and then giving the blessing to Esau.

Vs. 5 - Rebekah overhears this conversation and takes matters into her own hands.

She says to Jacob...

1. FOOLISH PLAN: Rebekah asks Jacob to sin in order to gain the blessing and birthright
 - She is not above deception, repeating the deception of Abimelech

In 25:27 we see a difference between Esau & Jacob: hunter and man of the field, vs. quiet, indoor type.

Now we see another: Esau is described as hairy and Jacob is smooth.

This is just another way of describing Esau as rough and Jacob as cultured and civilized.

But I believe the narrator wants us to see not just their differences, but also their lack of character.

Moses wants to show, as he presents these brothers to us, that the growing tension that exists between the two of them is not just because they are different, but is the result of their character flaws.

This is true for us too... (jobs, relationships, marriage)

Jacob is called Trickster/schemer

- the deception of this plan fully captures Jacob's name (takes advantage of both father and brother).
- shows both son and mother (at least in this instance) to be dishonorable
- The law would later condemn this type of oppression of the disabled (Lev. 19:14; Deu. 27:18)
- Lev. 19:14 - You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.
- Deuteronomy 27:18 (ESV) - "Cursed be anyone who misleads a blind man on the road.'

And so now we see the full extent of Isaac's blindness.

The fact that Rebekah's foolish plan has a chance to succeed shows that while Isaac is physically blind, his senses (both spiritual and common) have become dulled as well.

Because how is this plan going to work?

- Can goat taste like venison?
- Does goat skin feel like human hair?
- Can Jacob's voice sound like Esau?

ISRAEL - Israel would relate to this because they were continually making foolish plans:

Desire to go back to Egypt, complaining about mana, forming the golden calf, taking the devoted things, seeing themselves as grasshoppers, marrying pagan wives, making treaties with pagan kings, rejecting God as king....

Israel would see Rebekah and Jacob and say, "we've made some foolish plans too, if God kept Jacob surely he will keep us..."

They would be reminded of the great testimony regarding God's sovereign control of creation:

- Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand. (Pro. 19:21)
- The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will. (Pro. 21:1)
- Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. (Psalm 115:3)

Application to us - We have all made foolish plans

- Skipping school
- Getting in bad relationships
- Being silent or involved in criminal activity
- Bad financial plans

Ephesians 1:11 - In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

God is at work in the midst of our mess, AND he uses our foolish plans to accomplish his desires.

When we are in the midst of mess/fire/storm, God does not leave us, he gets in the mess... - with us!

We can be encouraged, take comfort, and be at peace because God is in control...

2. PASSIVE MAN: Jacob obeys his mother rather than God

One of the results of the fall is that man has failed to rule and subdue the creation.

- Cultural mandate - replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion (creation as Eden)
- Our failure because of sin
- This manifests itself in at least two ways.

- Disobedience (active)
- Failure to act (passive)

Jacob does both of these but he is mostly passive, while his mother acts.

And so Jacob objects to his mother's plan because he thinks, "my dad might touch me and..." (vs. 12).

Jacob objects, but not on moral grounds but because of the fear of being caught and the consequences

Jacob knows that an act of deceit and treachery like this would

- disqualify him from any paternal blessing and inheritance
- would produce only a curse...
- make it appear that Jacob is making fun of his father Isaac.

Rather than stand up to his mother and do the right thing, Jacob obeys her - [27:14-17]

Why does Jacob do this? For the same reason that we do it...

James 1:14-15 (ESV) - But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Desire is not just sexual. We can want and be tempted by many things.

Jacob was tempted by the birthright...

Bonhoeffer on Temptation:²

In our members there is a slumbering inclination towards desire which is both sudden and fierce. With irresistible power desire seizes mastery over the flesh. All at once a secret, smoldering fire is kindled. The flesh burns and is in flames. It makes no difference whether it is sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity, or desire for revenge, or love or fame and power, or greed for money, or finally, that strange desire for the beauty of the world, nature. Joy in God is in course of being extinguished in us and we seek all our joy in the creature/creation (instead of the Creator). At this moment God is quite unreal to us, he loses all reality, and only desire for the creature is real; the only reality is the devil. Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God. And now his falsehood is added to this proof of strength. The lust thus aroused envelops the mind and will of man in deepest darkness. The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us. The questions present themselves: "Is it really not permitted to me, yes-expected of me, now, here, in my particular situation, o appease desire?"

Jacob, and everyone in this narrative is given over to their desires; they are models of what not to do.

Jacob is a man giving in to his temptation, giving in to the desire for the blessing and not concerned with

obeying God. And though God is merciful to Jacob, Jacob still experiences some pretty severe consequences

- driven from home with nothing
- Serves twenty years in the wilderness
- Never sees his mother again (he was her favorite)
- Yet God is present working behind the scenes working for Jacob and for Israel

² Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Creation and fall; : a theological interpretation of Genesis 1-3 [and] Temptation*

What did this say to Israel/what does this say to us?

We all face temptation and we need to be reminded

- temptation is not the sin
- Disobedience is a problem – God is calling us to holiness
- Failure to act, when inactivity dishonors God is a problem
- Yet God is present working behind the scenes for us

It's simple, but God wants us to obey Him.

God wants us to obey Him in the big stuff, and in the little stuff.

God wants us to be like Peter and the apostles in Acts 5:29, "We must obey God rather than men.

The point of the church is to create obedient disciples:

Matthew 28 - *"make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."*

3. MISGUIDED AFFECTIONS: Rebekah is willing to accept the curse in Jacob's place,
- this is the perversion of a mother's love (Pro. 31)

Rebekah offers to take the blame

She offers herself as the recipient of a curse instead of Jacob.

- Rebekah is the chief actor in the deception of Isaac. She is making things happen
- Her activity brings to mind her energy when the servant found her at the well
- Rebekah's sin is driven by the desire to see the divine word she received during her pregnancy come to pass (25:23 – the older will serve the younger)
- She is committed to this, staking her life on it

RH NOTE

- though her methods are wrong, we need this type of conviction
- Rebekah reminds us that Christ is the only answer (substitute) for our situation, not foolish plans.
- APPL – turn away from schemes, foolish plans, substitute idols, and depend on and trust God completely.
 - Trust the Word
 - Learn to pray and commit to pray
 - Depend on the body of Christ AND become a part of the community

Rebekah's faith pays off and no curse falls on her, she pays a price for her deception...

- she disappears from the narrative after chapter 27 (she is referred to but is not heard from again)
- She loses contact with both sons and dies without a memorial
- there is no mention of her death (Sarah in 23:1-2), and her nurse is memorialized in 35:8, not Rebekah (Now Deborah, **Rebekah's** nurse, died and was buried...)

As we noted before this family is a mess.

Isaac is depending on his senses and they are failing him.

Rebekah is depending on manipulation and deception.

Jacob is depending on fraud, schemes and lies.

The parents are picking favorites and the kids are disobedient and ready to kill each other.

It is a family that is up to their necks in mess...

- Their foolish plan
- Passive man
- Misguided affections

But in the midst of all of this we don't have a story of judgment, or anger, or destruction.

For Israel and for us, this is a narrative of God's grace, and of hope.

In this narrative we see how God works out his plan for blessing in our lives despite evil being perpetrated against us or by us.

God never approves of sin, or deception, or wickedness, but He sovereignly uses it to bring about the best for us...

God is saying to the church that He is not depending on us to bring about His will and His purposes.

He does sometimes use us, but He is not depending on us

But He is determined to use us, by His grace, to glorify Himself, and bring us home and into his glorious presence.

So we can be encouraged that in the midst of our mess, in the midst of our broken, foolish plans, that our salvation, victory, and deliverance is not by power or by might, but by the grace and Spirit of the Lord.