

Esau's Robe - Rev. Andrew Coghill

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[0 : 0 0] In Genesis 27, we read at verse 27, So he came near and kissed him, and Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said, See, the smell of my son. This is the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed.

This episode in Genesis 27, it seems at first glance a shameful episode of cruel deception practiced on one of the saintliest men of the Old Testament. And that is not untrue.

That's exactly what it is, because it was all of that. But the injustice at the human level must not blind us to the workings of God at the deeper and more spiritual level.

Isaac, at this stage, is at least a hundred years old by now. You know, we're told at the end of chapter 25 that he was 60 years old when Rebekah had the twin boys. In chapter 25, the latter part of verse 26, it says, Isaac was 60 years old when she bore them. And we see at the end of chapter 26 that Esau is taking two heathen wives when he is 40 years old. Chapter 26, verse 34. So, 60 and 40, it's a hundred. So, Isaac is at least a hundred years old, perhaps quite possibly more than that.

And obviously, at this time, he expected his own death imminently. You know, he says, I'm old, I don't know the day of my death, and so on. And clearly, his family thought much the same.

[1 : 4 5] You know, we see a bit later on, after this episode is concluded, at verse 41, if we were to read on, we say that Esau comforted himself after this incident, says, the days of mourning for my father are near at hand. So, he thought he was going to die soon as well. But in the end, old Isaac lives to be 180. We see that in chapter 35, at verse 28. So, you know, he's only just about halfway through at this stage, but he thinks he hasn't got long to go. God's actual time is not necessarily our anticipated time. I'll say that again. God's actual time is not necessarily our anticipated time.

And God's purposes are not necessarily the same as our plans. Clearly, Isaac had planned, had wanted to confer the blessing on Esau, who was his favorite. You know, is there perhaps here a suggestion that Isaac, you know, was a little more than just physically blind? Was it perhaps, was he guilty of spiritual blindness where his favorite son was concerned? You know, at the end in chapter 25, we see how it says that, so Esau despised his birthright. And Isaac probably would have known about that, but doesn't seem to bother him. When Esau takes the two heathen wives, again, shows absolutely terrible spiritual judgment. Isaac doesn't seem too bothered about that. Is he perhaps a wee bit spiritually blind when his favorite son is concerned, as well as being physically blind?

But Isaac wanted Esau to have the blessing rather than Jacob. Now, to our modern eyes, this seems almost a fuss about a formality. You know, worrying about a mere form of words and who gets the blessing of the old man. But in the time and culture of Canaan, the head of the family in the days of the patriarchs effectively acted as the priest for his own family. He was like the go-between between the divine and the human. And that was true for the worshipers of Jehovah. It was also to an extent true even of the pagans round about them, the Canaanites that worshipped other gods as well. But the blessing that was conferred by the patriarch was truly and actually conveyed through the solemn benediction of the head of the family onto the next one. The words pronounced made the fact a reality. Now, the nearest equivalent that, you know, in our day nowadays, might be perhaps, if you think, it's the power invested in, say, either a registrar or a minister at a wedding or something. You know, when the nearest equivalent is when he says to the bride and groom,

I now pronounce you man and wife. And at that point, they are. And until the minister says that, or the registrar says it, it isn't the case. There's all the service and the preamble and the leading up to it, and maybe singings and prayers or whatever, and maybe taking the vows. But until the minister says, I now pronounce you man and wife, they're not.

And once he's said it, they are. So up until the time when he says that somebody could still burst through the back of the doors of the church and say, don't marry him, marry me, or whatever, or try and disrupt the service. But once he has pronounced them man and wife, it's too late. And he can't take it back, and we'll come to that in a wee minute as well.

[5 : 34] He can't take it back five minutes later and say, nah, I've changed my mind. You're not married anymore. Because once he's said it, that's it done. And once Isaac has given the blessing, that's it done.

You can't grab it back out of the air. So just like in a modern wedding ceremony situation, there are folk untending to be married. They're about to be married. They're nearly married, but they're not actually married till the minister or the registrar says, I now pronounce you man and wife. So likewise, here with the blessing on Jacob or Esau, once it was given, it was too late.

It was a real blessing that had actually been conferred and could not now be taken back any more than, as we said, a minister could say, ah, I've changed my mind. You're not married anymore.

Yes, they still are. Even if he changed his mind, it's too late now. But however much Isaac may have wanted to confer the blessing on Esau, and indeed he thought he was doing so, remember, there can be no doubt that God intended it for Jacob. Now, that may be something that's beyond us.

You know, I remember a godly old minister of whom I knew in previous generations used to say, you can understand the God of Abraham. Well, you can understand that. The God of Isaac. Yeah, saintly old soul. You can understand that. But the God of Jacob, that chancer, that twister, that deceiver, which is exactly what Jacob is. Why would God choose to confer the blessing on a guy like that? We just can't get our heads around it. But perhaps it's proof positive that it's nothing in us that makes God choose whom he will. There can be no doubt that God intended it for Jacob. That is not to say that God approved of Jacob and Rebekah's methods any more than God approved of David's killing Uriah so that David could have Bathsheba. But nor did that alter God's plans for and blessing of Solomon, the son of David in Bathsheba. Nor does the unpleasantness of this episode nullify God's great workings, nor the power of his word to teach us something of salvation, even in such a passage as this. In the third century, a North African bishop, St. Cyprian, famously said, he cannot have God for his father, who has not the church for his mother. And we would recognize the church of Jesus Christ as our spiritual mother, just as God is our father. Like Jacob, it is our father's blessing that we need. But as in this episode, it is from our mother that we hear about it. And when his mother told him about the blessing that was there to be had, just like him, we are full of all manner of excuses. You know, when I say we hear it from our mother first, what I mean is very few people are actually converted in their infancy. Some, no doubt will be, but very few. What we tend to do is we tend to hear about Jesus in the family, in the church, in the Sunday school, what have you. We hear about Jesus.

[9 : 09] We're taught about Jesus. We're nurtured in the knowledge and the stories and the teachings of Jesus in the family of the Lord's people, in the church, in our mother. And then the day may come when we're actually converted and changed by the power of God's Spirit. And that's the blessing of our father that we receive. But we hear it first from our mother. And likewise, Jacob hears about this blessing first from his mother. And she has her own plans about how he's going to go about getting it. And when she tells him, he's got all manner of excuses, just as we do, as to why this blessing should not be for us. Obviously, God is unlike Isaac in that he is neither blind nor ultimately ever fooled, no matter how treacherous the lies we may try to tell. But even Isaac is not stupid. You know, he too senses when people pretend to be what they're not and all too quickly present a cheap imitation of the reality that they should have. He perhaps does not know exactly what's going on, but he knows something's not right.

How is it that you found it so quickly, my son? The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. The voice is the voice of a hypocrite and a liar. The skin covering, like that which covered Adam and Eve, is from the dead carcass of an innocent beast, slain to cover the nakedness of the seat. The kiss is the kiss of the traitor. But as in Gethsemane, the treacherous kiss sealed and settled the final act, and there was no going back from that moment. So here, with the kiss of Jacob, it is when he kisses his poor trusting father that the old man smells the scent and is finally convinced, see the smell of my son. It says the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed. Esau's robe is that which seals the occasion, which means the blessing will be brought forth. It will be almost, if we can say it reverently compelled. Because Isaac is now convinced that the one that he is blessing deserves it, because it is his favorite son, his blessed son. See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed. It is because the garment of the elder brother clothes the unworthy imposter that Jacob is finally accepted and duly blessed. The parallels with us ought to be clear enough. We know our elder brother and what he has done for us. Hebrews chapter 2 tells us, verses 11 and 12, for he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers. Not ashamed to call them brethren. Clothed in his righteousness alone, we are bold to stand before our heavenly Father and to receive his blessing at last. 2 Corinthians 5, we read the opening verses, for we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling. If indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked.

For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened. Not that we would be unclothed, that we would be further clothed, or clothed upon, as the authorized version puts it, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. Our mortality is clothed over in Christ's immortality.

Our sin washed away, and we are stripped to our nakedness that would be to our shame, save that we are clothed over already in Christ's perfect righteousness. The robe of the elder brother.

See, the smell of my son is as a smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed. And this is our righteousness.

[14 : 09] Jeremiah tells us, chapter 23, verses 5 and 6, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king, and deal wisely, and shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.

In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called. The Lord is our righteousness. And we are clothed in the garments of our elder brother, clothed over in his salvation, his righteousness.

That is what the Father's perfect justice beholds. That is the fragrance, the sweet savor that God smells in the heavens.

Not the stench of our sin, but the fragrance of Christ's perfect righteousness. To go back to our incident here in Genesis, when Esau returns, of course, he is naturally distraught.

Verse 34, we read of how he is tearful at losing his father's blessing. But I would suggest to you that the very real love which undoubtedly existed between father and son here, and which perhaps had blinded Isaac's spiritual discernment, was as far as it went.

[15 : 29] With Esau, the tragedy, the gut-wrenching, heart-breaking, desolate grief into which Esau now descended, was the losing, as he saw it, of the blessing of Isaac, remember?

Whom, we must assume, he did love devotedly. Let's not pretend that he didn't. You know, later on, when he saw that the Canaanite wives he had taken didn't please his father, well, he went and took another wife, just, you know, adding more onto it.

Only this one was a relative of Ishmael, Abraham's other son. He was trying to please his father. He just didn't get it. He just didn't get it.

But he desperately wanted to please Isaac in his own way. But it was quite simply too worldly, too earthbound, too spiritually blind to see that with the blessing of Isaac had gone the blessing of God.

Esau's love for Isaac would die in the fullness of time. The Lord's love for his covenant children is a love which will never die.

[16 : 45] It will never go away. It will never end. We see in verses 36 and 37, it says, you know, Esau says, Have you not reserved a blessing for me?

Isaac answered and said to Esau, Behold, I have made him lord over you, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son? Esau said to his father, Have you but one blessing, my father?

Bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. The tragedy, of course, is because how could Isaac reserve a blessing for Esau when he had genuinely believed he was already giving Esau everything?

Has the father only one blessing? Esau asked, Lord, father, if you only got one blessing, surely there's another blessing for me. I would suggest to you in all reverence that just like Isaac, the father, our heavenly father, has more than one blessing.

He has blessings at different levels. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that of his father, He says, He maketh his son to rise on the evil and the good.

[18 : 06] He sendeth the rain upon the just and the unjust. In Acts 14, when the apostles are speaking to those in Lystra, they say, Yet he, that is God, did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

There are those for whom, indeed, there are multitudes for whom this is as high as their ambitions ever rise.

The world and the flesh, if not perhaps overtly the devil, certainly the world and the things in it. If you were to ask most young people in an early stage of their lives, what would you most like to be? I want to be rich and famous.

I want lots of money. I want everybody to know who I am. But nobody really thinks through what that actually means. Most people who live their lives under the celebrity microscope are miserable.

Most people's lives who are celebrities, their lives are a car crash. And for the most part, those who do make it, with any semblance of normality or anchored in anything, are the exception rather than the rule.

[19 : 28] Money clearly does not make people happy. because all it means is that everybody wants a piece of you, and everybody wants a piece of what you got, and you just never know if they love you for who they are, for who you are, or for what you can do for them.

And yet, for so many people, it is the good things of this world, the good opinions of men, the wealth or the prosperity, that's the blessing they want.

That's what they want their Isaac to give them. The blessings of the field, the blessings of the flocks and the herds, and the abundance and the wealth. That's what they want.

That's what Esau really hates the fact he's missed out on. There are those for whom this is as high as their ambitions ever rise. It is all about the world.

It is all about the flesh. But does God bless them? Well, yes, He does. He gives them exactly what they desire. In Matthew's account of the gospel, we read in chapter 6, still in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks about those who, He says, "Us, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others.

[20 : 46] Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others.

Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces, that their fasting may be seen by others.

Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. What they want is the praise and adulation of men. What they want is to be thought godly, not to actually be in a relationship with the Lord.

They want the reputation. Well, they've got it, Jesus says. They already have their reward. They've got what they wanted. Everybody looks at them when they're doing these things. Everybody says, ooh, ah, how holy they must be.

They have their reward. The question for each of us is, is that the depth or the shallowness of the blessing that you desire?

[21 : 53] Is that one reason why Esau was appeased when Jacob finally came home in chapter 33? Do you remember the incident that Jacob sends ahead of him so many flocks and herds and goats and camels and all this drove that comes to Esau?

You know, one after the other, after the other, hoping perhaps that this will appease his brother's wrath against him. Sure enough, it seems to work. God undoubtedly preserves and keeps Jacob and delivers him.

But is this one reason why Esau is in fact appeased? He says, oh, it's okay, brother. I've got enough. But he's obviously impressed by it. Maybe it strikes the chord.

Who knows? There is an earthbound blessing that God is very ready to give, but it is of fleeting, passing benefits.

And there is a heavenly blessing, a covenant blessing, the benefits of which may not be so clear so quickly, but which will outweigh and outsoar and outlast all the glories of this world.

[23 : 03] Yes, the Father has more than one blessing. Which kind are you seeking today? God meant Jacob to have his Father's true blessing, just as God means for us to have his own true blessing.

But though it is we who receive it and not another, we may approach our heavenly Father only under the cover of another's identity, another's robe, another's righteousness, another's scent and fragrance by which we are clothed and without which our own stench of sin and false righteousness would repel our heavenly Father.

For he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. If we come to him just as we are, he would see us for what we are. He would reject the sin that he cannot look upon.

We needs must be washed of that sin in the blood of Christ, stripped of our own false righteousness and clothed over in a garment, the robe of the elder brother.

But the scent of Christ, of the Lord our righteousness, delights the heart of the Father. See, the smell of my Son is as the smell of a field that the Lord hath blessed.

[24 : 40] What might the Father say of his Son? See, the scent of my Son, the fragrance of purity, of holiness, of self-sacrifice, of divine love and purity.

That is what his children are clothed. That is the promise for us. That is the blessing that the true Father desires to give us. He knows who we are.

And he loves us. But he loves even more the one in whose name we come. if we come. For we must come in the name of Christ alone.

This is true salvation. This is the robe in which we must be covered. This is salvation clothed only in Christ.

Let us pray. Gracious and beloved Lord, we do thank Thee for the pure and perfect righteousness of Christ, which clothes over all the sin and uncleanness and deceit of his children.

[25 : 47] We thank Thee, Lord, that the scent and the fragrance of that purity is that which is acceptable in the sight and sense of the Father in heaven, of his perfect justice, of his perfect purity.

So grant us, O Lord, that blessing, not merely the blessings of this world which Thou givest in abundance, giving us richly all things to enjoy, but that true blessing which will outlast and outsoar and outlive all the transitory blessings of the earth.

So help us then to look to our elder brother, clothe us over in his perfect righteousness, and cause us to be acceptable in Thy sight through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen. Well, we close our worship this morning, singing to the Lord's praise in Psalm number 71. Psalm 71 in the traditional psalter, and we find this on page 311 of the blue books, and we'll sing the verses 14 to 18.

That is five stanzas. Psalm 71 at verse 14, But I, with expectation, will hope continually, and yet with praises more and more I will be magnified.

[27 : 00] And so on to the verse 18, And now, Lord, leave me not when I, old and grey-headed, grow, till to this age Thy strength and power to all to come I show. Psalm 71, verses 14 to 18, five stanzas to God's praise.

But I, with expectation, will hope continually, and yet with praises God's praise.

I will be magnified, I will be magnified, Thy justice and salvation, my heart, my mouth, approach a shore.

In all the cheap, for I let all the numbers do not know.

And I will cause and legal war, it strength of God the Lord, and my righteousness and life.

[29 : 00] A Lord, I will reclaim. A Lord, I will reclaim. For even from my youth, O God, By Thee I have betored.

And heather too I have declared The wonders there has sought.

And now, Lord, leave me off When I hold on, beheaded, go.

Till the tearless heat Thy strength and power To all to come I show.

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God our Heavenly Father, And the communion of God the Holy Ghost Rest upon you, and remain with you each one this day, And forevermore. Amen.