

A DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY Genesis 26:34-27:38

There's a new show on television called *Toddlers and Tiaras*. Have you seen this show? Girls as young as 2 compete in beauty pageants with fake teeth, spray tans, and cavier treatment in their hair.

I saw an episode with one parent who was having her 2 boys compete with all the little girls. She said, "These boys are the girls I never had, so I'll just turn them into girls."

Another parent I watched said, "I'm very competitive, I want to do the best at whatever I do and I want my daughter to do best. Cassidy's first pageant, she didn't win queen, she won princess, and I stormed out and ran over her award in the parking lot."

Now, we laugh at such things and tell ourselves we'd never do that. But we do do it, don't we? What about the beauty pageant at school? My child gets all 'A's and is in honors classes and 14 school clubs. What about the beauty pageant at church? My kids dress nicely, don't listen to secular music, and know their catechism. What about the beauty pageant that goes on at the family reunion? Or the beauty pageant in the Christmas card?

You know what I'm talking about. "This year, our family finally reached perfection. Little Johnny is now 4 and taking college classes. Little Susie is 7 and is the principal violinist for the New York Philharmonic. John Sr. loves his job, and I love my work running every committee in town."

Some conservatives decry the decline of the modern family. But I think in suburbia, family has never been so important as it is today. For many people it's the standard by which they are measured. There's a good side to that. Certainly attentive, challenging parents are better than neglectful, uncaring parents. Any day. But there's also a bad side to that. When we set up our kids' success as the key to our happiness, what happens if they fail? What happens if they resent our involvement and our obsessive parenting?

Your family can be your idol. It can be the thing you unconsciously bow down to. And there are 2 big consequences if you define your life by your family image. #1, If the image fails, you'll be uncontrollably angry or in despair. #2, You will always judge other people by how good their family looks. You will, you won't be able to help it. If it's the measure of life for you, it's the measure of life for everyone.

But, the Bible has a different message than our modern conservative culture warriors. Certainly the Bible is pro-family, but it doesn't hold up family as the highest good. In fact, it says that sometimes you're family can get in the way of what God wants from you.

Listen to Jesus' words in Matthew 10: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

Genesis 27 is about a family that had little peace. In fact, at times it seems like it's going to come swords. Now as I've read commentaries on this passage, there seem to be 2 views of what happened here:

- 1) Rebekah favors Jacob, the younger, and Jacob is greedy, so they plot to deceive their poor old, blind father- and they steal Esau's blessing. This is the traditional interpretation, and sets up the rest of Jacob's life as a redemption story- 'Jacob was a deceiver early, but then got a taste of his own medicine when he was deceived by Laban. Then God confronted and changed him and he got right with God and men.'
- 2) Isaac favors Esau and doesn't value God's prophecy nor his son Jacob. In fact, he's become a tyrant who is going to give everything he has to the firstborn, a shocking break of custom. And Esau is a wicked son, who takes foreign wives, sells his birthright and doesn't walk with God. So, in reaction, Rebekah and Jacob do the only thing righteous people can do in response to a tyrant- they deceive Isaac, in order that God's prophecy might come true and that Jacob will have a future.

I'll be honest- I don't know which view is correct. Both have details to commend them. On the one hand, the narrator plays up the suspense of Jacob's deceit. With all the details we keep thinking, 'is he going to get caught?' But on the other hand, the New Testament tells us that Esau's life is full of sin- and that this is God's judgment on him.

Regardless of who is right in this story, one thing seems clear: this family is a mess. Parents aren't supposed to play favorites, but they do. Husbands and wives are supposed to work together, but they don't. Brothers are supposed to have each other's back, but these brothers would rather stab each other in the back.

If you thought the Bible was about perfect little saints who always did the right thing and set a good example, you haven't really read it. The Bible is excruciatingly honest- its characters are 3-dimensional with serious flaws and lives deeply affected by sin. In fact, all of the Old Testament 'heroes' live messy lives and their families are often totally dysfunctional.

Not too different from real life, huh? Our families are supposed to be the safe places- the places where we get what we need to be productive, stable individuals in life. But, sometimes that doesn't happen. Some of us lined up to get a Norman Rockwell painting of a nice American family and got *the Manson family instead*.

If your family is a mess, you're not alone. If your family can't love each other well, you're not without hope. There's a greater family that you can belong to. And it's one that will last forever. See, your family won't last forever. Even the best don't. How do I know that? Because Jesus said it. When the Sadducees were confronting Jesus and trying to trick Him they painted a scenario for Him, "now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother. So too the second and third, down to the seventh. After them all, the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be?" But Jesus answered them, "In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven."

Why won't we be married in heaven? Because we'll have a greater family. The greater family is God's family. The Church. This family has a Father who is both all-powerful and all-loving and adopts us as His own. And it has an older brother named

Jesus who loves all of the brothers and sisters so much that He rescued them from death and gave His life in exchange for theirs.

Knowing this family has consequences. Counselors and Psychologists are pretty united in the fact that having an abusive or neglectful father is a key ingredient in the mental and emotional health of a person. They even have a name for it- a Father wound. Some of you know exactly what that is, even if you've never heard the term before.

You can deal with your Father wound a few different ways: You can pretend it's not there, or that you're strong enough it won't affect you. Good luck with that- I don't advise that. Or you can pursue your father, whether he's alive or dead and try to get what you need out of him. Many movies have been made about this, like *Good Will Hunting* and *Magnolia*.

Or you can let God be your Father. Let Him fill up your wound with perfect, unconditional love. Where you never heard your dad say, "I love you," you can hear your heavenly Father say, "I love you always and forever."

The other consequence is that we can *stop judging everyone else and ourselves on the appearance of our families*. We can be a mess. We can be dysfunctional. Little Johnny can get busted at school for smoking marijuana and little Susie can get pregnant- and it's not the end of the world. I know some of your hearts just stopped beating when I said that. I'm not saying don't teach your kids the right way to live. And you'll even need to discipline them well, and keep expectations high.

But what I am saying is that there's life beyond failure. You can look at your screwed-up family and say, "That's all right. Because my righteousness is not in my kids, it's in Jesus. I know He approves of me, and so I can take everyone else's disapproval. And I can take my own shattered dreams and give them to God."

See, when you see your family as the core of your reputation and image, what you're really doing is posturing in front of a judge. But that judge isn't your neighbor, or your mother-in-law, or the other parents in your son's class. Behind every judge in this life is the Heavenly Judge. The big question is, 'How will He judge me?'

There are only 2 answers- either He'll judge me based on my works, or He'll judge me based on someone else's work in my place. The Gospel says that Jesus Christ is the substitute for sinners. Not only did He die in our place, He also lived in our place.

It's what the Bible calls 'righteousness,' and it says that, on the cross, "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." He got our sin, we got His righteousness. And now when the Judge looks at us, He sees Jesus and declares us 'not guilty.'

But some of us live like Jesus hasn't fully satisfied God's righteous law. We live like the war is still on, and we have to win it. In 1945 World War II ended, peace was declared and all of the countries involved called their soldiers to come back home. In 1972, however they found a Japanese soldier hiding in a cave in Guam- *27 years after the Japanese surrendered*. He didn't know the war was over.

If you can't stand for anyone to criticize your kids- you haven't understood Jesus' victory for you. If you always make excuses for your kids and get them out of trouble- you haven't understood the victory of the gospel. If you fall apart when your family falls apart, you haven't really internalized the hope that your eternal family and Heavenly Father give you.

Itzhak Perlman is possibly the greatest violinist in the world. He practices 9 hours a day and has nearly 100 recordings to his credit. Recently, he went to New York City to play a concert which included Brahms's *Violin Concerto in D*. Now, this violin concerto is one of the most difficult pieces of music in print- most violinists consider it unplayable.

The night of the concert, the orchestra begins playing and early on Perlman breaks a string. Now the violin only has 4 strings, and if you break 1, it's almost impossible to play. So, that night, when they realized what had happened, the orchestra stopped, assuming Perlman would want to change instruments and start over. But incredibly, Perlman motioned for them to immediately start playing. From there on out he transcribed the piece in his head from 4 strings to 3. (I've been playing classical guitar for 20 years, and would never attempt to play a piece with a broken string) When the piece was over, the audience erupted in wild applause.

Afterwards Itzhak Perlman told a reporter, "All my life it has been my mission to make music from that which remains."

How like God, who makes music even out of our brokenness. So, let's embrace one another as family. Every person in this room who has joined the Church that Jesus built is your brother or sister. And every one of us is saved by grace alone. So we're all on equal footing.

As sinners we meet at the Lord's Table, to remember our equality and our eternal neediness. If you think you have it all together, then you don't need this table. But if you're broken and in need of grace, then come.