

# Generational Sin

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[0:00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm one of the pastors here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. And it's my joy to bring God's word to you this morning. We're continuing our series in the book of Genesis.

You'll remember that Genesis tells the origin story of God's people, Israel. And this summer we're looking at the story of Isaac and Jacob, mostly Jacob, which is in chapters 25 through 36. And to a certain extent we're asking the same question we asked last summer. You'll remember we were in the Abraham story and we said, what does it look like to follow God in faith? That question is going to continue for Isaac and Jacob, although as I mentioned last week we're going to have some new layers, some new themes that get brought to the forefront in this part of the story.

So last week we looked at God's faithfulness to his covenant generation to generation. There's the passing on of the blessing from Abraham to Isaac.

[1:02] This week we're going to start a theme that is going to show up over and over in the book of Genesis, which is God's work in and through dysfunctional families.

It's going to be a repeated theme. So remember chapter 25, we had the birth of the twins, Jacob and Esau, to Isaac and Rebekah. Now in chapter 26, we have gone back in time.

Jacob and Esau have not been born yet. So this is back when Isaac and Rebekah were just the two of them before they had kids. You'll remember verses 1 through 5 of 26, Isaac took on the mantle of Abraham.

Okay, that was our main focus last week. This week, it's not the mantle he takes on. Isaac takes on the sins of Abraham.

So that's our topic this morning, generational sin. You'll see that the title of our sermon on page 7. That is sin patterns that are passed down from parents to their children.

[2:07] I'm going to talk about two things with that. First, we're going to talk about generational sin in general, the concept and idea of that. And then secondly, we'll look at the specific sins that get passed down through Abraham and his line.

So with that, I invite you to turn with me now to Genesis chapter 26. You'll find it page 7 of your worship guide. And as we turn there, remember, Proverbs chapter 30 tells us, Every word of God proves true.

He's a shield to those who take refuge in him. And so that's why we read now Genesis chapter 26, starting at verse 6. So Isaac settled in Gerar.

When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, She is my sister. For he feared to say, My wife. Thinking, lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah, because she was attractive in appearance.

When he had been there a long time, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah, his wife. So Abimelech called Isaac and said, Behold, she is your wife.

[3:21] How then could you say, she is my sister? Isaac said to him, Because I thought, lest I die because of her. Abimelech said, What is this you have done to us?

One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us. So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we do thank you and praise you again this morning, that you've given us life and breath to come before you.

You've given us the health to gather. We thank you that you've given us your word to remind us of your great grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. We ask that you would be at work here and now in a special way, by your Holy Spirit, that you would penetrate our hearts and our minds with your word, that would lead us to great conviction, and even more than that, it would lead us to great love and devotion to Jesus Christ, that you would show us Jesus in his great beauty and glory and majesty. And we ask all of these things in his mighty name. Amen. I'm not as tall as Daniel Sanchez, so I have to bring this down a little bit.

[ 4 : 50 ] The story is told of a young couple, a newly married. Their first holiday rolls around, and so the wife cooks the family recipe of the roast that has been cooked for generations in her family.

And before placing the roast in the oven, she cuts off the ends of the roast. Roast comes out. It's wonderful. Her husband compliments it. He says, Honey, this is a wonderful roast.

It's the best I've ever had. But I have a question for you. Why did you cut off the ends of the roast? She says, That's how my mother did it.

That's how it's done. So he calls up his mother-in-law and says, Why do you cut off the ends of the roast? And she says, That's the way my mother did it.

That's how you cook a roast. And the husband thinks to himself, That doesn't make any sense. It's an expensive cut of meat. Why would you cut part of it off and throw it away? So he calls the grandmother.

[ 5 : 52 ] Why do you cut off the ends of the roast? And she said, Well, that's quite simple. I had a small oven. And that's the only way the roast would fit in the pan.

So the grandmother's solution to a temporary problem becomes this permanent practice. And on the one hand, it is completely irrational.

Right? They have larger ovens now. They don't have to cut off the ends of the roast. On the other hand, it makes complete sense. Because patterns, habits, values, quirks, get passed down generation to generation.

And if you've been married for more than a few minutes, of course you know this. You don't just marry a person. You marry their family and the currents, the forces that have been flowing there for years and years and years.

You know this intuitively. If you look at a family, you see patterns. You might say, Hey, you know, that family, they, they are like that. They are generous. They are kind.

[ 6 : 57 ] They are weird. They are smart. Whatever it is. Right? And not just harmless patterns. Not just quirks. There's also sin patterns.

They are really greedy. They are really rude. Whatever it is, the patterns of sin, things that are passed from parents to their children.

Because that's what we see here in this passage in Genesis. Verse 7, Isaac lies about his wife, Rebecca, out of fear. When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, She is my sister.

For he feared to say, My wife, thinking, lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebecca, because she was attractive in appearance. Now, if you were here with us last summer, this should sound super familiar.

Abraham did this not once, but twice. Remember Genesis chapter 12. Abraham heads down into Egypt. He is scared, and so he says, His wife Sarai is his sister, and Pharaoh takes her.

[ 8 : 06 ] Then, God afflicts Pharaoh and his household with great plagues, and so Pharaoh kicks Abraham and Sarai out of Egypt. If that weren't enough, it shows up again, chapter 20, Abraham is in Gerar, the exact same place that Isaac is in now.

Notice verse 6, so Isaac settled in Gerar. It's not just the same pattern, it's the same place, and this, again, Abraham encounters Abimelech.

Now, whether it's the same Abimelech, it could be. It could also be that Abimelech's what they call a dynastic name, which you're familiar with with Egypt. There's not just one Pharaoh, but many Pharaohs.

Pharaoh is just what you call the ruler. So, maybe Isaac is dealing with the same Abimelech from chapter 20. It's possible. Maybe he isn't. Either way, Abraham says Sarah, because her name has changed at this point, is his sister.

Abimelech takes Sarah. This time, God warns Abimelech in a dream, Abimelech returns Sarah. Abraham runs the same play twice.

[ 9 : 18 ] And so, it's not a coincidence that Isaac here in this passage experiences the same fear and has the same crafty response.

Dad, that is Abraham, feared man more than God. And so, the son, that is Isaac, fears man more than God.

Dad, that is Abraham, lied rather than trusting God. And so, the son, that is Isaac, lies rather than trusting God.

All of this is tied up in this basic principle of reality. And it's this. God has designed the world in such a way that the family has incredible power and influence.

God has designed the universe. He set it up so that families are what shape us and form us. It can be negative, it can be positive, it can be for good or for ill.

[ 10 : 37 ] Counselors will tell you there's no more important relationship in your entire life than the relationship you have with your parents. That's the way God's made things.

And so, our parents' practices become our path of least resistance. The stories that your parents lived by become the default stories for you to live by.

Now, don't hear what I'm not saying. Those things are not your destiny. This isn't set in stone, but they're your default. How did your parents deal with pain or stress or fear?

That's often going to become the way that you deal with pain or stress or fear. Not your destiny, but your default. You'll see this on page 8 of your worship guide, a quote from a woman named Steffi Wagner.

Pain travels through families until someone is ready to feel it. Now, I'm going to rephrase that for us.

[ 11 : 51 ] As Christians, we might put it this way. Sin travels through families until someone is willing to repent.

Abraham's line is going to continue to be crafty and conniving until someone is willing to feel vulnerable and trust God.

Abraham's family is going to continue to be a family of schemes until they're willing to let their grasp go and trust that God is in control.

Now, this isn't saying that we're not responsible for our own sin. We are, all of us. It is saying our parents' patterns are going to determine which sins are easier for us, which are more tempting. It's possible to take this too far. It is a principle. It is not an unbreakable rule. But it's a powerful principle. You see on page 7 of your worship guide, I've shown you guys this quote before.

[ 13 : 03 ] Communities have their own stories and those stories are contagious. Families have their own stories.

Those stories are also contagious. Contagious. do you know the story that your family has been telling?

Do you know the story that was handed to you by previous generations? Do you understand it? Can you name it?

Do you know what has been passed along? Do you know your inheritance? For good or for ill? If you don't know it, and if you can't name it, you have some homework.

Because whether you know it or not, it is there. Now some of it, I'm sure, is really good and positive. We've talked about this before.

[ 14 : 16 ] Everyone's made in the image of God. Everyone has something good and beautiful about them. I'm confident that your parents have passed on something good to you. Some of it is not so good.

And God is calling you to repent of those things and to turn away from them. the question is, do you know what places those are?

Do you know the story your family has told? what you have inherited?

I want to talk for just one minute about what you're passing on because of course there's a bit of a warning here for parents. Robert Murray McShane who is a Scottish pastor in the 19th century said this, this is on page 8 of your worship guide, what your people need from you most is your own personal holiness.

Now he's speaking to pastors, so we'll change this, what your children need from you most is your own personal holiness.

[ 15 : 44 ] That's part of their inheritance. That's part of what you're passing on. Are you passing on a story of trusting God and his providence? Are you passing on a story of righteousness and holiness?

Is that what they're receiving? That's more important than money and experiences and getting into a good school.

Those things aren't bad, they're just not the most important. Look with me for a minute on the back of your worship guide. there's this haunting quote from Richard Rohr.

By the way, I don't recommend this book or Richard Rohr necessarily. I'm just giving you this quote. If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it.

Usually to those closest to us, our family, our neighbors, our coworkers, and, this is the hard part, invariably the most vulnerable, our children.

[ 16 : 57 ] And I'll change this quote as well. If we do not repent of our sin, it will become baggage that we hand off to our children and they will get to unpack.

It will that we your sins become your children's default. And they will have to choose whether to accept it or to repent and head in a different direction.

What story, what baggage do you want to pass along? what your people need from you most is your own personal holiness.

I told you we would talk about two things, generational sin in general and the specific sins of Abraham's line. We've talked about generational sin, so we're going to pick up the story of Abraham.

Abraham, verse 8 tells us when he had been there a long time. Commentators make a big deal out of that phrase because what they say what this tells us is that Abraham had this fear, he had this fear that people were going to head, or sorry, not Abraham, Isaac had this fear, Isaac had this fear that people were going to go for Rebecca, right?

[ 18 : 35 ] He's there a long time and what's happened? Nothing. No one has made a move for Rebecca.

Isaac's fear was a fantasy. He made it up. They had all this time.

They had all this time to head after Rebecca, and no one did. There was a study that came out in 2019 about people who experienced generalized anxiety disorder, and they tracked all the things that they worried about to see if they actually came true.

91.4% of worry predictions did not come true. The most common percentage of untrue worries per person was 100%.

In other words, they're worrying about all these things that are not going to come to pass. The same thing here happens with Isaac. He's put all this work into controlling the world and protecting himself for nothing.

[ 19 : 47 ] Of course, it reminds me of that line from Crime and Punishment, which is on page 7 of your worship guide. Your worst sin is that you have destroyed and betrayed yourself for nothing.

Isaac has gotten all worked up about something that's not real. He lies about his wife. He's sneaking around. He refuses to trust God. All for a fantasy.

That takes us to verse 8 again. Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebecca, his wife. Now, we can tell from the context here, laughing is a euphemism.

Laughing is apparently something that brothers and sisters never do. Verse 9, he says, how could you do this?

In other words, even the pagans know this is a terrible idea. Verse 10, you could have brought guilt on us. And so, there's this rich irony, the same irony that was in chapter 20 with Abraham.

[ 20 : 50 ] The pagans are more righteous than the patriarchs. They have a clear moral compass. They know what is good and wise more than Abraham and Isaac.

Why? Why does Abraham, why does Isaac do this? Well, he tells us, verse 9, because I thought, lest I die because of her.

Of course, we knew that already, right? Verse 6, he feared to say, my wife. And so, the point is this, Isaac fears man more than God.

Isaac trusts his own schemes, he trusts his own cleverness more than God's promises and protection.

Isaac has decided there's only one person who can get things done and it's him. Families have their own stories and those stories are contagious.

[ 22 : 04 ] And the story of Abraham's family is this, it is 100% up to me to protect myself.

if I don't make sure it gets done, it won't happen. The ends are going to have to justify the means because God will not show up.

It's my cunning and my schemes that will make things happen. That's a very different story than the story that we're told in the gospel.

The story of the gospel is not that it is all up to you and your cunning and your schemes that you have to hold the world together by white knuckling. The story of the gospel is very different.

It's the story of Hebrews chapter 1 that God holds the world together by the power of his word. It's the story of Psalm 23.

[ 23 : 11 ] The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. And for Isaac in this moment that story loses.

Isaac forgets or does not believe what we saw last week. Remember the blessing is passed on.

What does it say? Chapter 26 if you're reading with your Bible look back on verse 3.

God has made Isaac a promise. He doesn't have to figure it all out on his own.

He doesn't have to scheme and connive. He doesn't have to lie and sulk around hoping that no one catches that him and Rebecca are married.

Now if it were just a promise from God it would be one thing but it's actually even worse than that.

It's more staggering because Isaac has seen with his own two eyes how great God is.

[ 24 : 15 ] Last summer chapter 22 what happens? God saves Isaac from being sacrificed and he provides a ram. If anyone at this point in the history of God's people has seen how great and powerful God is it is Isaac.

And yet the story of his family wins. Brothers and sisters even more than Isaac we have seen how great God is.

And we've seen how great God is in the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Romans chapter 8 what did we finish with?

He who gave you his son will he not also with him give you all things? How could we doubt? How could we believe that it's all up to us when God has given us Christ?

And yet we do. Isaac did as well. That's our hope. That's the horizon line we set our eyes on.

[ 25 : 37 ] That God has saved his people. That he's given them a glorious future in heaven with him. And of course he will give them all they need along the way.

! Now some of what I've said this morning about generational sin, about passing things from father to son and mother to daughter, some of that I could have told you if I was a Muslim.

There's a certain common sense wisdom to this. Of course we know families have patterns. Of course they're powerful. What's different about the gospel, what's different about the story that the Bible tells us is this, that in the midst of the mess that we have made in and with and through our families, God intervenes.

The family is powerful. Hopefully I made that point in the first half of the sermon. It has incredible power. God's grace and his commitment to his covenant and his steadfast love are much more powerful.

The story of Abraham and Isaac and their generational sin does not have the last word.

[ 27 : 16 ] Christian, no matter how messed up your family is and it is because you live east of Eden, God is more powerful.

Jeremiah 23, God's word is a rock, excuse me, a hammer that breaks a rock into pieces. What do I always say? It means there's nothing so powerful that God's word is not more powerful still.

There is nothing that has happened in your family or that you have given to your children that God is not more powerful still.

Genesis is a story about a wildly dysfunctional family and this is just the start. Okay, buckle in. It's going to get worse in coming weeks.

And God works his covenant promises through them. All these people show up in the genealogy of Jesus.

[ 28 : 25 ] God's grace is more powerful. God's grace has the last word. Family is a painful topic.

If you're paying attention this morning, my guess is it stirred things up in you. Whatever it stirred up in you, that's not the end of the story. It's not too late for something new.

And that's not because of some therapeutic healing journey that you're going to go on through another country. No, it's not too late for something new because of the steadfast love of the Lord.

God is more powerful. Isaac's sin doesn't have the last word.

God's covenant does. Next week, I should have included next week's verses in this week's reading. Next week, it starts out, our passage, it starts like this. This is verses 12 and 13.

[ 29 : 31 ] And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundred fold. the Lord blessed him. In the midst of Isaac's stupidity, in the midst of his fear, in the midst of his sin, God is still at work.

Praise the Lord, his mercy is more. Stronger than darkness, new every morn, our sins they are many, his mercy is more.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you again for your word. Thank you that you present us in the Bible, not with stories of people who are scrubbed and polished, but with people who are messy and dysfunctional, just like us.

You show us in the midst of that your great grace and mercy, which gets the last word. We ask that you would remind us of that, that it would become our great hope and our confidence. We ask these things in Jesus name, amen.

Amen.