



TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

Talk Genesis 25:29-34: Esau Sells His Birthright to Jacob

Lesson 58

"Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. 30 And Esau said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary." Therefore his name was called Edom.^[a]

31 But Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright as of this day."

32 And Esau said, "Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?"

33 Then Jacob said, "Swear to me as of this day."

So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright."

Background Notes

How old were Jacob and Esau when this event took place? We don't know for sure, but probably they were teenagers, or in their early twenties. Jacob, who liked to stay around home, had evidently become a pretty good cook. One day Esau came in from a long day of hunting in the field, and he was famished. He caught a whiff of the lentil stew that Jacob had just cooked up, and it smelled good. I wonder if Jacob had planned all this, knowing that Esau would be famished when he came in from a day of hunting. In any case, Esau wanted that food so much that he was willing to sell his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of lentil stew!

Remember that Jacob and Esau were twins, but Esau had been born first, so the birthright belonged to Esau. Can you sell your birthright? Yes, in those days you could transfer the benefits and the responsibilities of the birthright. There are extra-biblical records known as the Nuzi tablets that date back to patriarchal times, and they testify to the practice of selling birthrights.

In those days the birthright consisted of three things: one, a position of supremacy in the family; two, a double portion of the inheritance (this later became part of the Mosaic Law); and three (and this is the significant point here), the spiritual privileges and responsibilities in the family.

Remember, back in patriarchal times there was no priesthood. The priesthood came later under the Mosaic Law. So the priestly rights and privileges and responsibilities, or the pastoral responsibilities within the family, were part of the birthright, and that belonged to the firstborn. It was a privileged position, as well as a very responsible position. In addition, the birthright in this particular family carried with it the promise of the Messianic lineage, a very important point here.

Esau couldn't have cared less about this third aspect of the birthright! He was a man of the moment, and right now he was famished. *"And Esau said, 'Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?'"* (v32). Basically he was saying, "What good is this birthright to me? Who cares about those spiritual privileges and responsibilities? I'm famished! Just give me that stew!" So Esau sold his birthright to his brother Jacob for a single meal.

Doctrinal Points

1. To despise the things of God is serious sin.

"And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright"(v34). Esau looked down on his birthright -- he held it in contempt. He treated it as worthless. Because of the spiritual aspect to the birthright, this attitude was very serious -- in fact it was sin, serious sin. Hebrews 12:16 warns us not to be like Esau, who for one morsel of food, a single meal, sold his birthright. For this he was called a profane person. *"lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright."*

To despise the things of God is a serious sin. Is it possible that there is an "Esau" here this morning? You may say, "No way! No way I'm like Esau. I would never despise the things of God." Well, what about our priorities? If we would much rather stay home and watch TV or read the Sunday paper rather than worshiping God with fellow believers, does that not indicate a certain "looking down" on the things of the Lord? If we'd rather spend more time reading a magazine or a good novel than spending time reading God's Word, is this not a kind of "looking down" on the things of the Lord? Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that it's wrong to read newspapers or magazines or good novels! It's our priorities that are the point. Where are your priorities? Where are my priorities? Is it possible that we are looking down on the things of the Lord?

We may not be fully like Esau, but it is possible that we are "partial Esau's." Maybe our priorities need some adjusting and some straightening out. To despise the things of God is a serious sin.

2. To scheme for the things of God is a serious mistake.

Jacob didn't despise the things of God. He was not like Esau -- in fact, Jacob appreciated the things of God. Jacob wanted the birthright, and later on he wanted the blessing as well. Jacob was willing to take on the spiritual responsibilities in the family. That's the good news about Jacob.

But Jacob went about it the wrong way. Jacob schemed to obtain the birthright. It's a serious mistake to scheme for the things of God. All Jacob had to do was wait on God. God had clearly declared before the boys were born that the older would serve the younger. It's possible that Isaac and Rebekah communicated that fact to the twins, but Jacob couldn't wait for God. He rushed ahead of God and schemed to obtain the things he wanted. Because this was a serious mistake, Jacob had to reap the consequences. Jacob had a long way to go in the "school of God." To scheme for the things of God is a serious mistake.

There are many applications of this principle today, but I think an obvious application would be in the area of schemes for money-making or fund-raising in the church or in

Christian ministries. I'm sure every one of you could give me an example of a fund-raising scheme for Christian ministries -- in fact, most of us probably got at least one fund raising letter from some Christian ministry in the mail this past week. Now I'm not saying that all fund raising for ministries is wrong, but there are many\ unbiblical schemes for fundraising out there, and they're certainly wrong.

Did you know that there are agencies that will do your fundraising for you? They will guarantee a certain return because they know how to manipulate people to give! There are Christian ministries that use these agencies -- and I'm talking about non-Christian agencies that can be hired to raise funds for your church or ministry. I believe that raising funds in a manipulative way is "scheming for the things of God." That is not waiting on God for His supply! We should do God's work in God's way. To scheme for the things of God is a serious mistake.

I am preaching a warning to myself right now. As many of you know, I am involved in a radio ministry called "Talks for Growing Christians." "Talks for Growing Christians" does not financially support itself. A few Christians, most of whom don't even hear the program, are its primary supporters. Now here's the point. I know that I could scheme to make this radio ministry break even, or actually make money! At the end of each program I could give an emotional appeal for support, and offer something to all who would send in a "love gift" this week. I could turn that manipulative crank, and the money would come in. But I don't want to start scheming for the "things of God." Do you? Once you cross that line, where do you stop? To scheme for the things of God is a serious mistake.

Practical Application

Will you sell your birthright for a single meal?

Hebrews 12:16 says that Esau sold his birthright for a single meal, for one morsel of food. How stupid can you be? That is really the point of the passage. How foolish to sacrifice spiritual blessing for a brief moment of physical satisfaction. That's really foolish -- but it is possible to do, and it is possible for us to do.

It's possible to trade spiritual blessings for momentary physical or material pleasure. King David did it! For one moment of pleasure with Bathsheba, David brought shame on himself and on God and God's people, and he reaped what he had sowed for the rest of his life. Yes, God "picked up the pieces" in David's life, but David experienced life-long sorrow and heartache and the loss of blessing for that "single meal" of pleasure. Will you sell your spiritual birthright for a single meal? This is quite a warning for all of us, right?

When I went to seminary, I was looking forward to studying under a particular professor whom I had come to respect. When I arrived on the campus, I found out that this professor had resigned from the faculty -- he had actually been forced to resign for moral reasons. To make a long story short, he had an extra-marital affair with the woman who was typing the manuscript for a commentary he had written on one of the Gospels! He left his wife and family and went off with this woman. For that brief earthly pleasure, he removed himself from an area of great spiritual blessing in his own life and in the lives of others. He essentially sold his spiritual birthright for a "single meal." He didn't lose his salvation, but he lost out on blessing, spiritual blessing.

Every Christian is vulnerable, and we can fall victim to strong desires in many different areas, not just in the area of sex. Some Christians trade their blessings, their spiritual blessings, for material gain and earthly wealth. Some Christians sell their spiritual blessings for positions of power, even within the church. Some Christians trade their spiritual blessings for the perfect retirement set-up. We are never immune. Age doesn't deliver us from this. Will you trade off your spiritual blessings for momentary, short-lived, physical or material benefits? Will you sell your birthright for a single meal?