

SESSION #12

In our last session we looked at the crucial **context** for the Birthright & Blessing, a context involving especially God's sovereignty and grace. Now we turn to...

B. THE BIRTHRIGHT itself

1. Parental Failure

Gen 25:28

And Isaac loved Esau because he ate *of his* game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

- right at the outset the parents set the scene for disaster by their own parental failure, a mistake that is made far too often by parents: they showed favoritism and partiality for the boys
 - Rebekah loved Jacob more than Esau
 - Isaac favored Esau

...and as we'll see later when we look at the story of Joseph, this parental failure shows up again in the next generation

2. Personal Failure: Esau's Attitude

- another crucial failure shows up in the life of the eldest twin, Esau
- and we see that the supreme test of character is often found in 'little things'
 - eg. Esau comes back from hunting, and he's hungry... an uncontrollable hunger

Gen 25:29-34

Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he *was* weary.

And Esau said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that same red *stew*, for I *am* weary." Therefore his name was called Edom.*

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.

And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised *his* birthright.

- his *physical* hunger vs. Jacob's *spiritual* hunger is in focus here
 - he wasn't on the verge of starvation – could have gotten food from his own family easily
 - but the red bean soup Jacob was cooking was exactly what appealed to him at the moment and he wanted *that* 'red stuff' – and so he carried the nickname ever after of "Edom" or "Red"! – from birth Red Hairy's entire life seems pointed toward this unlikely focal point: a **pot of red stew** ...the priorities of his sensual life and the absence of spiritual concern destine him for nothing more than this!
 - in Heb. 11:20-21 **Jacob** is named among those who believed in the promise
 - in Heb. 12:12-17 **Esau** is called "**godless**" and is an illustration of those who do not believe the promise
 - vs. 16 of Hebrews 12 says, "...careless about God [godless] as **Esau** [was]: he traded his rights as the oldest son for a single meal."

- “godless” or “profane” means the opposite of “sacred”
 - ...such a person is earthly, earth-bound – spiritual things are of no importance
- he lived for present pleasures, not future intangibles; for the physical, not the spiritual; for time, not eternity
 - Job spoke about the curse of letting your “heart walk after your eyes” (Job 31:7); and that’s what Esau did
 - Heb. 12:16 in the Message translation gives us a strong personal warning: *“Watch out for the **Esau syndrome**: [what’s that? =] trading away God’s lifelong gift in order to satisfy a short-term appetite”*
- later, when Jacob had gained the blessing through deception, Esau responded with “a loud and bitter cry” (27:34)
 - he is the classic case of someone who wants to do his own thing, turning his back on God, but still wanting God’s blessing ...that’s not possible!
 - eventually the day comes when the reality of what has been lost strikes home to all the *Esaus* of our world with terrible impact
- Esau’s situation reminds me of someone’s definition of “real **failure**”:
 - “living without knowing what life is all about, feeding on things that do not satisfy, thinking you have everything, only to find out in the end you have nothing that matters.”*
- he had all the **spiritual advantages** of the day – he was the grandson of Abraham, and the son of Isaac
 - but he squandered those resources in his carelessness about that which was most important and made *daily choices in the wrong direction*
 - ... *our* daily choices also point our lives downward to the “red stuff” (or “gold stuff” or “green stuff”) or upward to the promises of God, and these daily choices have serious consequences for us too, just as they did for Esau
- we’ve looked at the Birthright; now we turn to...

C. THE BLESSING

- the ‘blessing’ in ancient biblical times was the official transferring of the **birthright** & the family inheritance to the chosen son; it was more like a prophecy than a prayer, and God himself ensured the fulfillment of it
 - chapter 27 of Genesis gives the story of how Jacob deceived his father to get the blessing
 - *let me summarize...* Rebekah overhears Isaac’s plan to give the blessing to Esau when his favorite son brings Isaac’s favorite food;
 - she gets worried and convinces Jacob to pretend he is Esau, taking a meal she prepares with her special recipe and wearing Esau’s clothing & pieces of goat’s skin to disguise his smoothness
 - Isaac isn’t convinced easily, but in the end pronounces the **blessing** on Jacob, which especially focuses on the material blessings of the Abrahamic promise; only later (28:4) does he bestow the full Abrahamic blessing on Jacob, after accepting that God had indeed chosen Jacob over Esau as the son of promise

- let's note some highlights from the actions of the main characters here...

1. Isaac's sin

Gen 27:1-4

Now it came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see, that he called Esau his older son and said to him, "My son."

And he answered him, "Here I am."

² Then he said, "Behold now, I am old. I do not know the day of my death. ³ Now therefore, please take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me. ⁴ And make me savory food, such as I love, and bring *it* to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die."

- **Isaac** certainly must have known God's prophecy concerning his two sons which designated *Jacob* as the one destined for the birthright & blessing (as we saw in 25:23)
 - furthermore, Esau had already forfeited the blessing by selling his birthright and by marrying Canaanite (Hittite) wives
- but in his favoritism of **Esau** Isaac wanted to do this *his own way*
 - ...even the rather secret way he goes about the preparations for this blessing shows that he knew he was doing something wrong – calling only one son to this ritual instead of both sons, and acting as if death is near when in fact he lived for over 40 more yrs
- he relied entirely on his **senses** here (sound, touch, smell, taste) – and every one of them betrayed him!
 - the constant call of God to His people is to walk by faith not by sight; by trusting God not depending on our senses

2. Rebekah's Scheme

- her **goal** was good – she certainly remembered God's prophecy given before the twins were born, and may well have wanted to prevent a spiritual tragedy here if Isaac gave the blessing to Esau, the wrong son
 - but her **methods** were absolutely faulty: she tried to work out God's will ahead of God's time, thru her own efforts
 - she simply didn't trust God to work things out
- and she was wrong in encouraging Jacob to be deceptive
 - ...an influence that had far-reaching implications as deception became one of Jacob's life-long traits – like mother, like son!

3. Jacob's Deception

- "the end justifies the means" appears numerous times as the operational principle in his life story
- Jacob however had no patience to wait for God's timing or God's means
 - Heb. 6:12 says, "We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who **through faith and patience** inherit what has been promised." (NIV)
 - 'faith' is a critical ingredient in following God; but so is *patience*

- Jacob had a degree of faith – unlike Esau, he valued very highly the birthright & the blessing, knowing that these were absolutely significant gifts from the God of promise
- but he had very little patience - his natural inclination was constantly to run ahead of God; he does it in buying the birthright, manipulating his brother in the process;
 - and he does it in gaining the blessing, deceiving his blind father in that process
- ...and we wonder how God could ever have chosen such a ruthless character!
 - but He does – in His **sovereignty** God operates against the **odds**, He goes against the **grain**; in His **grace**, He loves the **unlovely**, and plants His promise in the **unpromising**
- we too can act like Jacob – knowing what God wants but impatiently pressing ahead of him in fulfilling it, fearing we will be *bypassed* somehow if we don't; even working out very careful plans to make it successful
- and it all sounds good because the goal is right, and we convince ourselves that our desires equal God's will and so we're working on His behalf!
 - ...the **rationalization** is subtle and seductive, but we are the only ones fooled by it