

## Selling a birthright: Genesis 25:19-34

We often hear of dumb things thieves do that result in their being caught. For example, there was the bank robber who was confronted by a teller who insisted he sign for the money he was stealing. He did so, using his real name.

One really dumb act is recorded in Genesis 25.

Genesis 25 records Abraham's descendants through Isaac, which is the line God ordained to be the one of blessing and promise. Isaac married Rebecca but for 20 years they were without children. Verse 21 records that Isaac took his problem to God and God answered his prayer. Rebecca became pregnant. Remember, Isaac was the product of a prayer by his father Abraham and was born at a time his mother, Sarah, was well beyond the age of giving birth.

In verse 22 we read that Rebecca sensed that something unusual was taking place in her body, so she inquired of God as to what the meaning of it was. Here we have a couple who had problems but knew where to go for answers. They had questions in the home but knew the God of all wisdom and went to Him in prayer. One wonders why so few Christians, with the invitation to come boldly to the throne, so seldom seek God's help or His answer to their problems.

Genesis 25:23 records that the Lord told her she was not going to have **A** child but **two** sons. In addition, she was told each would be the head of a great nation, one would be stronger than the other and, very strangely, the younger would rule over the older.

In our western culture each child is free to become whatever he can. But in the eastern world age rules. The eldest is automatically above his brothers and sisters and he automatically assumes both the privilege and responsibility of heading the family upon the death of the father. Never would a younger brother be put in a position of ruling over the older one even if he were more capable or better able. But the Lord, speaking to Rebecca, declared that she would give birth to two sons and the elder will be ruled by the younger.

Verses 24-26 record the birth. The first was named Esau and the second Jacob. Then in verses 27-34 we have the account of how it came to be that Esau submitted to his younger brother after selling his birthright. That fulfilled the prophecy of God.

In verse 27 we have the setting. Jacob was home after his day of work and had a bowl of pottage that Rebecca had made for him, Pottage was something like cornmeal, that is a boiled dish made with grains and was the staple food of many desert people.

Esau returned home. Esau was a hunter, a more active, and, I suspect the more exciting, lifestyle of roaming about the countryside for some animal to kill for fresh meat. On this occasion he was returning very tired, hungry and empty handed. Esau found his younger brother enjoying a bowl of pottage and said, **"Give me something to eat."**

Jacob says according to verse 31, “**Sell me your birthright.**” What was the birthright?

- 1) It was authority over the family upon the death of the father. His mother and any unmarried sisters were a special concern, but it carried the overall leadership of the family.
- 2) It provided a double portion of all property as an inheritance so that he could properly support his mother and sisters.
- 3) Until the time of Moses and Aaron the eldest was also the priest of the family

Jacob said to Esau, “*Tell you what I’ll do. I’ll sell you a bowl of pottage for your birthright.*” Archaeology shows that such sales were valid and binding.

Esau thought for a moment, probably a very short moment, and says “*I’m at the point of death and frankly a birthright is no good if you are dead. If I don’t get some food I’ll die.*” How easy it is to justify stupidity. If Esau was right, it would be understandable, but nothing was further from the truth.

Esau would never have been permitted to starve to death in his own home. Besides, all he was getting was one bowl of pottage and in no way would that have been adequate to meet his needs if he really was as hungry as he claimed to be. But Esau had just one thought on his mind, the lust of his flesh. He was hungry and wanted food, he wanted to have his appetite satisfied and he wanted it immediately. It really did not matter what it cost him to get it. So. in verse 33 we read he swore unto Jacob and sold his birthright to him.

Of course, Esau was not alone in history as one to give up a precious gift for a moment of pleasure, to give up a valuable gift to get that which could not last or really satisfy.

Moses gave up the right to enter the land of promise because of a moment of doubt when he struck a rock instead of speaking to it as God had directed.

Achan, in Joshua 7, sold his life and that of his family for a few pieces of gold taken from the city of Jericho.

Samson, for the love of a woman sold his place among God’s servants

In the New Testament we have in Luke 18:18-34, the record of Jesus speaking to a rich young ruler who loved his wealth and chose it rather than following Jesus. Later in Luke 22 we read that Judas, for 30 pieces of silver sold his Lord and lost his reason to live.

Acts records how Ananias and Sapphira withheld on a promise to God and pretended to be what they were not and thereby sold themselves unto death. The Apostle Paul talks of others who sold themselves to the devil, to lusts and desires, to false prophets.

Esau made a grave mistake, a foolish trade, giving away his spiritual and material future for a bowl of pottage to satisfy a momentary desire. And many others have sold equally great and sometimes even greater treasures for even less. Daily Satan tempts us to sell what is really valuable for little or nothing. Jim Elliott said, *“He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”* Unfortunately, too many give what they should not lose for that which, in the end, they cannot keep.

Non-Christians sell their opportunity to eternal life by rejecting God’s love and offer of salvation for the pleasures of this world, the satisfaction of the moment, the pride of life.

Too many Christians today are also giving up so much for so little. Too many Christians are giving up family by being so busy with other things, all of which they argue are important, so they are not home when their children need them. Too many Christian parents are giving up the spiritual growth of their children because life is just too busy for devotions and study. They give up what they should never lose for what they cannot hold onto anyway.

How many Christians give up the blessings of being in God’s house with God’s people because they want a little extra sleep or think that Sunday is the only day they can do other things?

And too many Christians are giving up spiritual growth because they have chosen TV over Bible study or the internet over prayer.

Were Esau alive today his case would probably make the Internet of foolish exchanges, ridiculous decisions. I wonder if God keeps a record of the foolish trades we make, of the things we give up that are so important for those things that are unimportant in the long haul.