

**Genesis 25: 24-34; “The Sins of Jacob and Esau”, Sermon # 74 in the series –
“Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 3rd, 2017,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

I think that we should begin this study with thinking about the fact that everything that God does is good and wise and perfect. “God created man upright (Ecclesiastes 7: 29) but he has sought out many devices.” That is what we are to learn here this morning. Sin has come into the world through the one man Adam, and because of it, we live in a fallen world, and we are all fallen creatures. Nothing can change this but grace; the great and super-abounding grace that is found in Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is evident to me from this passage that both Jacob and Esau were sinful men. They were both trying to get what they wanted out of life. This interaction between these two brothers who were fraternal twins, has much to teach us about sin. And hopefully we will take it to heart, and pray about ourselves and our own way of thinking, so that God will be pleased to hear our prayers, and give us the grace and ability to lovingly interact with our closest relatives and with each other.

All of us are sinners, but sometimes we do not perceive that there are consequences to our sins that will affect our eternal destiny if we are careless sinners like Esau. And sometimes even as Christians we can sin in such a way that it causes others to stumble and fall as well. And so God must teach us what it means to be loving, and holy, and righteous. So the question that we want to think about at this time is this: What kind of men were Esau and Jacob, and how can we learn from their sinful mistakes? I think that we can learn from these men the following important lessons.

1st – Sin is something that is in our nature from even before our birth. (verses 22-26)

You remember the question that came to Rebekah’s mind as she felt the twins wrestling and struggling in her womb together. “If all is well, why am I like this,” she asks. All was not well; there was sin in the hearts of the two children in her womb, and it was being acted out in a very disturbing way. When she inquires of God, she is told that two nations are in her womb and the older shall serve the younger.

Romans chapter 9, verse 10 and following amplifies this truth of God’s purpose. “And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, ‘The older shall serve the younger,’ as it is written, ‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.’” Paul then goes on to defend God in terms of His Elective purpose by saying, “What shall we say then?” “Is there unrighteousness with God?” “Certainly not!” “For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.’” “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.”

This is a very important point for us to consider this morning. God’s purpose for us, His eternal purpose, is established before we are ever born and before we ever do anything good or bad. We do not know that purpose in regard to ourselves or other people around us unless God reveals it to us. In this case, it was partially revealed to their parents. “The older shall serve the younger.” But the Apostle Paul goes further to state that God’s whole purpose of showing mercy or not showing mercy to any individual is not based upon their works; anything that they would will, or strive, or struggle to attain to, in regard to themselves.

But rather, it is based upon God’s sheer grace and mercy in Christ. We are fully responsible for our sins, our sinful attitudes and actions in the sight of God, and we are sinners from the moment of our conception as it says in Psalm 51, verse 5. “Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.” And Psalm 58 verse 3 it says, “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.”

But God’s eternal purpose interacts with our sinful nature as we go through our lives to show us the consequences to ourselves of acting independently and rebelliously against his revealed will.

This means that when we are told what the truth is about God Himself and His sovereignty that we should consider that God is far greater than ourselves and our personal desires. We should come to Him in prayer and ask Him to change our sinful heart so that we will not fight against Him and fight with others who are closest to us.

When we come to realize that we are sinners from our mother's womb we should flee to Jesus Christ for grace to change that fallen nature by giving us a New Nature and the Holy Spirit so that we will be able to do what is right and good to the glory of God. We should seek Christ until we find Him, and come to know the reality of His grace working in our hearts.

2nd – Sin is something that develops as we grow up in relation to our God-given gifts.
(verses 27 and 28)

“So the boys grew and Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents.” “And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.” We see that the disposition of each of these twins was manifest from a very young age. In fact we could back up to verses 25 and 26 and observe that Esau, being the more active and aggressive of the two came out first. This, of course was God's providential will and ordering in accordance with His purpose. Esau's whole physical appearance, being red, and hairy like a garment would seem to indicate that God had created him for the very purpose which he eventually came to pursue; that of being a strong, passionate, manly, outdoorsman and hunter.

It says in verse 27 that he became a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. The word mild here means “simple” or “complete” in the sense that he was a man who not interested in pursuing the sports and recreations of the outdoorsman. He was more of a homebody and more given to quiet and solitude in the good way of meditation upon God's works. He was more naturally inclined to be helpful and obedient to his parents in the household, and his interest was in caring for the flocks and herds.

Matthew Poole says of this verse, “He was a sincere, honest, and plain-hearted man; quietly minding the management of his own domestic affairs, his lands and cattle, and giving no disturbance to wild beasts or people.” I have already told you that I am not convinced that Jacob was at this time a regenerate man. But I am convinced that it was a part of his natural disposition to have a regard for spiritual things in a general sense.

He probably did not mind attending whatever family worship took place in the household, and he probably thought quite often about the things that he learned. This did not necessarily make him any better candidate for God's salvation than Esau was. But his disposition as a simple and mild man might bring the things of God's revelation before his mind, and into his thoughts, more frequently than a man like Esau. Esau probably did not want to be there at family worship at all, and could not wait until the service of worship was done so that he could go the fields and play or hunt.

We as parents need to take notice of the disposition of our children and attempt to bring the gospel to them in accordance with that disposition. Just because a child or young person is more compliant or quiet does not mean that the Spirit is at work in their heart striving with them unto salvation. It may indeed be an advantage, if they are given to reading and books, but not necessarily. They may read every book but the Bible and even fill their minds with the vanity of the world and sensual things rather than books that would profit their souls and the development of a relationship with Jesus Christ. They may even have a sinful interest in seeing themselves as more religious, or more obedient, than their siblings, and actually look down on them because they are not consciously trying to please their parents.

We as parents will need to pray just as much for the simple, quiet ones to come to take an interest in Christ, as much as we do those who are wanting to be outside all the time. It is true that each individual child has a bent toward certain things that interest them. And that bent can have its good qualities in a human and moral sense; and yet, those same qualities which are their strong

points can be misused to sin against God or others. It was not intrinsically wrong that Esau's disposition was to be an outdoorsman or a hunter.

It was not that bent that led him to despise his birthright, or led him to be a fornicator or an oppressor of God's people. It was that he allowed sin to grow up and to be cultivated with his natural God-given disposition, thinking and concluding that he must look out for his own interests and disdaining and despising God's word to him in his heart. This, of course, would lead to his eventually acting out in a profane way what was in his heart. It would lead to his dishonoring God and hurting other people around him. God gives us all the abilities and talents, and even the interests that we have in whatever we legitimately pursue in our life. But if sin is cultivated in the use of those abilities to further our own selfish interests, then we end up harming our soul and hurting others and dishonoring God.

This is why, parents, that we must not only pray for our children that the Lord will open their eyes to where and how they are sinning, but we must gently but firmly, explain to them where they are sinning in regard to the use of their greatest natural God-given abilities and strengths, so that perhaps, by the grace of God, they will be brought to humility over it. We must warn them against pride and sensuality. We must show them how wrong it is to cultivate the attitude of independent self-sufficiency; thinking that because they are able to do certain things well in their own strength and wisdom, that they do not need God's help and grace to accomplish their objectives in life.

We must gently reprove them and reason with them when they become angry or sullen when they cannot attain to what they want in life, right away, by their own efforts or intelligence. Remember how God said to Jonah when He did not bring judgment down on the Ninevites – “Is it right for you to be angry?” And He said to Cain – “Why are you angry?” “And why has your countenance fallen? We should especially encourage our sons toward humility and what I would term, “a masculine gentleness and a holy meekness” which will defer to other brothers and sisters instead of striving to get only what they want out of their relationships with them.

And then we also must not forget to tell them that they must repent of these sins of trying to manipulate and control others, or trying to take advantage of their weaknesses, when they discover them. Parents teach your children the truth of Proverbs 4: 23 – “Guard your heart with all diligence, for from it flows the issues of life.” (NAS) But how can they do this without Christ? They cannot and will not find their own strength sufficient for such guard duty. And so, you must urge them to begin to pray about their heart, and to personally ask the Lord God to give them a New heart and save them from their sins. This leads me to say;

3rd – That sin is something that will cause even close relatives to take advantage of each other's weaknesses. (verses 29-31)

Here we have the two brothers each pursuing the things that they are interested in. Jacob was at home cooking a meal of a red colored lentil stew and fresh baked bread. Esau had been out hunting, and comes in from the field weary. And he says to Jacob, “Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary.” Feed me some of that red stuff, he says. Now notice the nature of Jacob's sin at this point. Jacob could have simply given Esau something to eat because he was thinking of Esau's welfare. He could have been thoughtful and sympathetic toward his weary brother and ministered to his physical need and encouraged him with kind words. But what is he thinking of? He is thinking of the fact that he had not yet acquired what God had promised to his parents in the Divine Oracle when he was born. He does not yet have the birthright. The promise was that the “older would serve the younger”, wasn't it? But how was he going to get it unless he personally tried to obtain it by cunning?

That is what he did not understand; how to obtain the birthright in God's way and in God's time. God had not given him any indication, personally as of yet, that he was really going to see that promise fulfilled and so he must find a time and way to get it for himself by his own clever plans. This indeed seemed to be the perfect time. Esau was hungry and weary, and so, knowing his

impulsiveness, Jacob believes that he might be foolish enough to barter it away for some of his good cooking. I think that Jacob knew Esau pretty well and that was why he tried this ploy.

Some of the commentators think that Jacob's desiring the birthright and seeking it in this way was not wrong because God had already revealed that it was His will that it should be eventually his and so it was not wrong to seize the opportunity to take it if Esau despised it. But I believe that the Scriptures teach us that although we may desire something that is in God's Will eventually to give us, but we go about to get it in the wrong way, He cannot approve of the sinful or selfish means that we use to obtain it. He would have so worked in His providence, for the person who was faithful to wait and to love their relatives, the blessing which he promised.

And He would have given it to them without any sorrow. "It is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it." God certainly knows the right time and the right way to bestow blessings to any person who is seeking them. But none of us needs to go about to personally fulfill that which God has promised by using unkind means, taking advantage of someone else's weakness or sinful stupidity, or by not listening to godly counsel. That is what I believe happened in this case. Jacob could have asked God about the promise, and he could have asked his parents about the promise, and God could have bestowed these blessings on Jacob, the younger son, without his ever having sinned against Esau.

And so, we will go on to see how God would have to lead Jacob and teach him. We will see that because of his selfish sinfulness that Jacob would have to learn the lessons of love and humility and waiting the Lord's timing, the hard way. He will learn it at the hands of Laban years later as we shall see when we get to that place in the narrative. A right heart does not take advantage to itself from another person's sinful weaknesses. It will await the right time and the right means to see all of God's good promises fulfilled. This is the thing that quite often in our Christian life is one of the hardest tests of our faith. And I certainly do not believe that Jacob passed the test at this time.

It took many years for Jacob to learn the lessons of grace; the lessons which God would teach Him. He was not yet converted at this point in time, but the sinfulness of his nature is shown to us very clearly here. He was unwilling to wait and let God unfold his life for him. He felt that he must press his own personal advantage even if Esau was to suffer great loss. If Jacob knew the value of the birthright, and I believe that he did, then he should have never asked Esau to sell it at all; he should have simply done a good work for him and given him of his stew, for free.

That would have been the right thing to do. But he did not yet understand how to be gracious. He did not understand thoughtful loving consideration of his brother, or how grace might work in his own heart, or how God is able to give the best things in His time, and His way, without there being any sins committed.

4th – Sin is something that, unless we are careful, it will lead us to despise the greatest things that God would give to us. (verses 32-34)

Jacob says – Sell me your birthright as of this day, and I will give you the food. And Esau said, Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me? Then Jacob said – Swear to me as of this day. And Esau said – Look I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me? So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Jacob rightly saw the value of the birthright, and Esau did not. "The first-born," Adam Clarke says, "had the following rights attached to his having the birthright." 1st – "The first-born were peculiarly consecrated to God." (Exodus 22: 29) "You shall not delay to offer the first of your ripe produce and your juices." "The firstborn of your sons you shall give to me." Then 2nd – The first-born was next in honor to their parents as it says in Genesis 49: 3. "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power."

3rd – The first-born had a double portion of their father's goods as it says in Deuteronomy 21: 17. "But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his." And 4th – The firstborn succeeded him in the government of the family, or kingdom, as it is written

in 2 Chronicles 21: 3. “Their fathers gave them great gifts of silver and gold and precious things, with fortified cities in Judah; but he gave the kingdom to Jehoram, because he was the firstborn.”

And although Adam Clarke does not mention this, we also find that being the first born son of Isaac held the prospect of all the spiritual blessings in Christ coming to him if he himself believed in the promise of the coming Seed. He would have come to know the blessing of his father communicated on to him in this way: That all of his believing descendants would come to know the riches of grace and eternal life in Christ. This was the particular part of the birthright that Esau despised. And of course, as we have seen, it was not according to God’s eternal purpose and decree that he should hold on to this birthright.

This does not justify Jacob’s hurrying him into taking an oath or his having him swear that he would turn the birthright over to him that very day. But it showed God very much about Esau’s godless and profane character, and it should show us what great danger there is in our being careless or casual about the great truths that God has given to us, lest we lose everything we have been given. I am speaking about the great temptations that come to us related to our falling short of the grace of God and our attempting to selfishly fight to get what we want in the Christian life and becoming bitter if we don’t.

Esau became profane, when for a single morsel of food, he sold the birthright. He would part with eternal salvation and all its blessings and eternal life for one earthly meal. He thought so little of these great and mighty things; despising them because he would live for the now, and not think about tomorrow and his eternal soul. It is no doubt true that he deeply regretted his decision to sell his birthright later on. It says in the book of Hebrews that he sought for it “with tears”. But he was rejected, “because he found no place for repentance”.

He did not see that he had despised God Himself when he despised God’s purpose. He only thought of his loss in an earthly selfish way; not in the sense that his sin had dishonored God. He never did learn the lesson of truth; that God was watching very closely to see and to know what was going on in his heart. And God does this in regard to knowing the hearts of every man, and every woman, so that He will be able to righteously judge them. And so we find, as we see the outcome of his life, that he perished in his sins.

Let us embrace the better way. Let us seek to know that the righteous way is seeking and finding the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and trying to see to it that no one around you will fall short of the grace of God. Let no one here despise their birthright. There are privileges which you have been given in relation to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the holy life that He calls you to. Do not be careless with them and sell them for some passing pleasure of sin or the gratification of some earthly appetite.

Come to Jesus Christ and you will never hunger, and believe in Him and you will never thirst. And if you live this way, others around you will come to see the reality of Christ’s great and powerful grace changing your life. They will see you change from pursuing utterly selfish and sinful pleasures and pursuits, to live a life of godliness with joy and peace. This is what glorifies God.