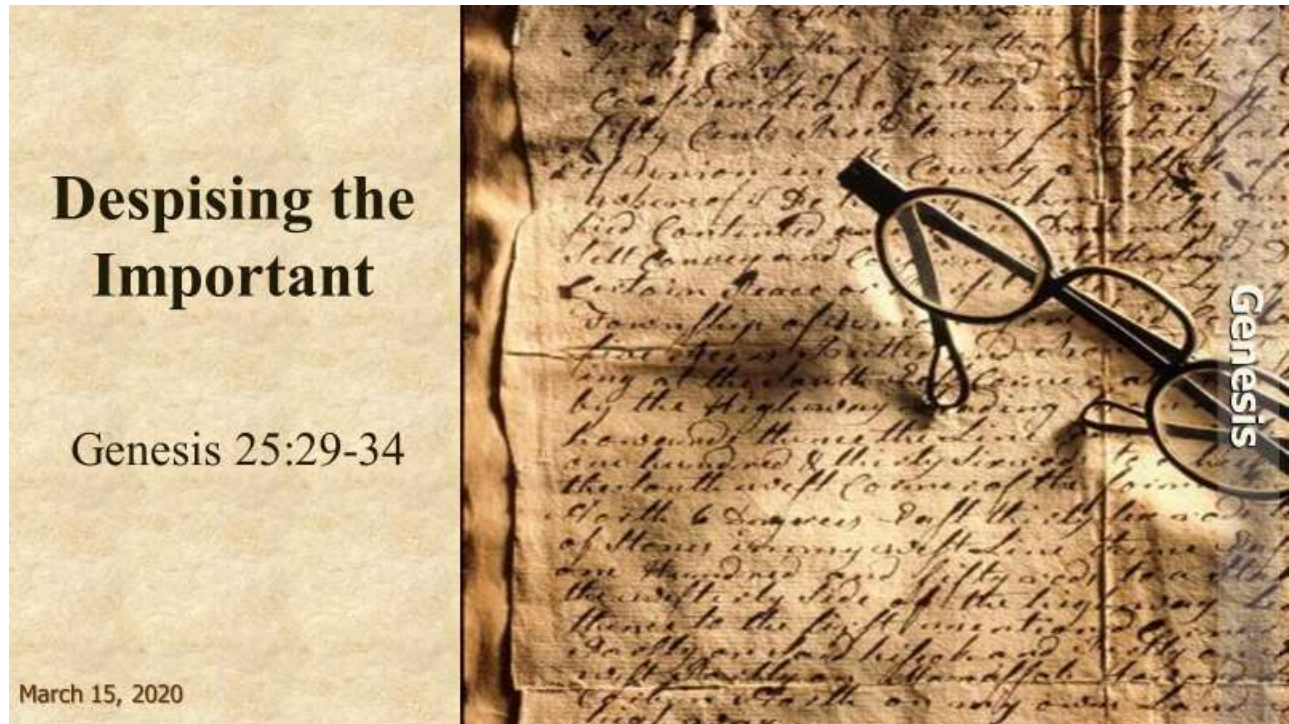


Despising the Important

Genesis 25:29-34

Pastor Mark Schindler



This morning we will be back in Genesis 25, picking up in verse 29. Our passage opens with the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Like Sarah, Rebekah was barren and after hearing Isaac's prayer, the Lord granted them twins. Throughout the pregnancy, Rebekah could feel them struggling within her. At their birth and as they grow up, they turn out to be two very different men. We often tend to think of twins as looking and acting alike. But nothing was further from the truth with Jacob and Esau. These differences also drew the affection of different parents. Moses reminds us in verse 28 that Isaac loved Esau and Rebekah loved Jacob.

A Study in Character...

- ✦ Esau - tough, skilled and self-sufficient
- ✦ Jacob - is intelligent, charming and refined
- ✦ Two different men, two different paths
- ✦ The older shall serve the younger



We are told in verses 27-28 how different they were. The descriptions here are external and yet intended to convey much more than it seems on the surface. We are to see a tension between the characteristics that are admirable and contemptible in both.

Esau is portrayed as an outdoorsman, a man of the field, a hunter. In our day, we would say he is a man's man. He is tough, skilled and self-sufficient. He loves to go out bring home meat to put on the table. And Isaac loves him for it. This is not, in and of itself, the problem. The problem is in his character. He is rough, impulsive and insistent on getting what he wants. The Hebrew here intends to convey the idea, as Kent Hughes points out, of a "shallow man, a lout", one who is ruled by his impulses. (Hughes, *Genesis*, p. 336).

In contrast, Jacob is a man of the tent, cultured, civilized and self-contained. In our day, we would perhaps think of him as a sophisticated man. He is intelligent, charming, with refined tastes. And he has the special love and attention of his Rebekah his mother. In many of the historical lists of kings from that same time period, admirable kings who were cultured and sophisticated were identified as "men of the tent." But like Esau, Jacob also has character problems. He is calculating, manipulative, and scheming.

So this is the background that Moses gives us to set up the next 6 verses. Moses paints the real picture of real people. Just like us, Isaac, his wife and children, are your basic run of the mill, sinful and dysfunctional family. The parents show partiality to their children in sinful ways. The children grow up playing to that partiality. And as they grow older these two very different boys head down two very different paths. You cannot think about this without an ominous sense that conflict is almost sure to ensue.

In fact, God had already told Rebekah that He was going to reverse the normal order in the family. Earlier in verse 23 God says, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, **the older shall serve the younger.**" [ESV] Jacob, the younger twin, would become the leader of the family. And Esau, the older would become Jacob's servant.


This rubs against our modern sense of fairness. Why should one brother be chosen over the other? But do not forget that Malachi, divinely interpreting this event, says that this was the sovereign choice by God. And Paul, in Romans, argues further that God, in the sovereign choice of Jacob over Esau, did so to serve His own purpose and plan before either Jacob or Esau had done anything good or bad. God is not subject to our sense of fairness or equality. His actions are always perfect and right, aimed at accomplishing His intentions and bringing Him glory.

[prayer]

Study in Genesis

Structure & Story

- ✧ A – Jacob Designs (v.29a)
 - ✧ B – Esau Arrives (v.29b)
 - ✧ C – Esau Demands to Eat (v.30)
 - ✧ D – Jacob Requires Him to Sell (v.31)
 - ✧ **E – Esau Disparages His Birthright (v.32)**
 - ✧ D' – Jacob Requires Him to Swear (v.33)
 - ✧ C' – Esau Proceeds to Eat (v.34a)
 - ✧ B' – Esau Departs (v.34b)
 - ✧ A' – Esau Despises (v.34c)



Let's follow the story as Moses records it for us. First, it is important to emphasize the chiasmic structure here so we can follow it more clearly. Point by point, Moses moves us in toward the key point and then works back out.

Follow along as I read this morning's text from Genesis 25, verse 29 to 34. Here is God's word to us. "29 Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. 30 And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.) 31 Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright now." 32 Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" 33 Jacob said, "Swear to me now." So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright."

A Jacob Designs (v.29a)

First notice the intent of Jacob's designs in the first part of verse 29. Jacob has prepared the meal in view of Esau being out on a hunt. It is likely that they are not at the family tent where they live, but that they are out on a trip together; possibly at one of the family's remote shepherding stations. This is not happen-stance. Esau the hunter is being tricked and trapped by an even more clever hunter. Jacob has watched as Esau comes and goes. He knows that he tends to over-extend himself. He is aware that Esau will come in from days of hunting with a great hunger and thirst. And more importantly, he also knows that Esau is an impulsive slave of his appetites. So, he prepares a red lentil soup, thick and savory as bait for his prey.

B Esau Arrives (v.29b)

In the last part of verse 29, Esau arrives back from hunting. He is famished and weakened to the point of exhaustion. Just as Jacob seems to have expected, Esau comes back and he is starving. You can see him, can't you? He is covered in dust and dirt. Sweaty, smelly, and perhaps boasting with stories of the hunt. Remember that not only did they have to go chase down the animals, they would have carried home all the game that was shot. His lips and tongue would have been dry from the heat and lack of liquid. His body would have been weak, and his stomach would have been empty and aching for food. He drops down wearily into the tent and immediately smells the delicious aroma of Jacob's savory stew. Jacob has Esau right where he wants him.

C Esau Demands to Eat (v.30)

As the plot and the stew thickens, we see in verse 30 that Esau does what any of us would do and demands some food to eat. Esau's intense hunger is met by the wonderful aroma of stew being cooked over the fire. The sense of Esau's request here is quick, insistent phrases. Hebrew scholars point out that Esau is speaking in short, guttural exclamations. He is saying, "Let me eat!"; "Let me gulp it down!"; "Red stew, now." He is exhausted, famished and driven by his overwhelming appetite. He has no time for pleasantries or wordy conversations. He is reduced to grunts and commands that come across as ignorant and foolish.

D Jacob Requires Him to Sell (v.31)

As we move to verse 31, Moses finally points out the purpose behind Jacob's scheming. Here is how we know that Jacob is not just taking advantage of the moment, but rather has plotted to take advantage of Esau. Instead of simply giving Esau some stew to eat, he instead offers it in return for Esau's birthright. Do you see the cold-hearted manipulation here? His brother is exhausted and weak from days without food, smelling the rich aroma of the stew that fills the tent. And Jacob offers to trade a bowl of soup in exchange for the birthright to the entire family inheritance. Jacob is a cheating scoundrel. This is no way to treat anyone, much more so your brother. Yet how often we are unkind and hurtful to those closest to us.

So what is a birthright? It is the family inheritance that normally went to the eldest son. Esau by the right of being first born would become the family leader and priest. The family line would pass through Esau down to his sons and grandsons. More importantly, Esau would be the recipient of God's promises to Abraham and to Isaac. It was not only a great

privilege, but involved an immense amount of wealth and a recognition of God's promises and purposes.

However, just a few verses back, God had told Rebekah that the younger, meaning Jacob, would take the place of the elder. This meant that eventually, Jacob would be the heir. This was a promise that God had made according to His sovereign plan. No doubt, Rebekah had shared this with her favorite son. Now Jacob, like his Father, decides to make it happen on his own. He is going to be sure that he gets what he was promised, even if it means cruelly taking advantage of his brother. And though Jacob is acting out of the deceits and conniving of his own heart, it is still the means by which God carries out His plan.

E Esau Disparages His Birthright (v.32)

In verse 32, Moses gets to the main point of this account and we see that Esau disparages and does not value his birthright. Do not take Esau's words here, though said in the moment, as casual or without meaning. They are a truly a reflection of his heart. "Out of the mouth, the heart speaks," the NT says. You see Esau has no real use for his birthright. He does not believe in it, so He does not value it.

We know this by how quick he is to trade it for a brief meal to satisfy his temporary hunger. Think about this. Esau is not really on the verge of death here. His words are an exaggeration that reflect how little he cares for the birthright. He is very hungry yes, but he is in no danger or being forced against his will. In this moment, he is ready and willing to trade it for food. Jacob is no less an uncaring and heartless brother. But Moses' point here is that Esau is a foolish man who cares so little for the family birthright that he is willing to give it away for a measly bowl of camp stew.

D Jacob Requires Him to Swear (v.33)

We see the final part of Jacob's scheme in verse 33. Jacob is poised to take full advantage of Esau and make him swear an oath to sell the birthright to him. It is not enough to just take Esau at his word. He wants Esau to give it the strength of a binding oath. Esau, in full view of what he is doing and those with them in the tent, Esau swears with an oath to trade his birthright for a bowl of soup. With the oath he signs over his inheritance, its position, the priesthood and the privilege to his younger brother. And so the hunter swears to the tent dweller that he can have it all for the price of a simple meal.

C Esau Proceeds to Eat (v.34a)

In the first part of verse 34 Esau proceeds to eat. It is easy to imagine Esau grabbing the bowl of stew and gulping it down. Esau is content with the exchange he has made. His appetite is quenched. His belly is full. The loss of his birthright is of no matter. The ache of his hunger has been satisfied. And without a second thought, Esau foolishly squanders his great inheritance to fill his belly with food. What a reminder to us that we should not follow the foolish example of Esau who forget the treasure of his inheritance and God's promise simply to satisfy the lusts of his flesh.

B Esau Departs (v.34b)

Esau gets up and goes on his way. He probably thinks he has won. After all, who in the world is going to believe Jacob? There is a casualness about this that is quite stunning. If you had just traded away the accumulated riches of Abraham and Isaac, the privilege of

being the one through whom God would fulfill His promises, don't you think you would be more concerned?

A **Esau Despises (v.34c)**

Moses concludes the account by making it clear that Esau despises his birthright. The final sentence leaves no doubt - "Thus, Esau despised his birthright." Esau had something that was very special, rich and wonderful. But he rejected God's definition of what was important. His heart had defined food and hunting and being alive as the most important things. He lived for adventure and thrills. He was skilled hunter and an outdoorsman. It was not just that he craved food, but he had no value for a birthright. In fact, he despised it.


Look at the verbs where Esau is the subject. He arrived; he demanded; he ate; he drank; he left; he despised. Here is a man who is casual and carnal, just doing what he always does when he wants to do it; without real consideration to what is important, valuable and lasting. How often we follow this same pattern, taking for granted what is most valuable in our lives.

In all of this, Moses means for Israel to understand that they cannot be like either Jacob or Esau. They should not use sinful means to bring about what God has promised. Nor should they despise the very great and glorious promises of God and the privileges of being the people of God. Trusting God can be hard. But this passage makes it clear that the consequences to not following God's ways and not treasuring His provision for us will only create heartache and a mess of our lives.

Study in Genesis

Crossing the Bridge

- ✦ People live out of their hearts
- ✦ People often allow their appetites to control them
- ✦ Wanting even a good thing too much will cause you to sin
- ✦ Jesus is a contrast to both Jacob and Esau
- ✦ God is sovereign even over our sin



So what are we to make of all this? Let's highlight some very important observations and principles here.

People live out of their hearts.

First, people love out of their hearts. Now do not hear me to be saying that people are controlled by their emotions. This is not what the Bible means when it teaches that people are controlled by and live out the thinking of their hearts. But make no mistake that Esau's actions are guided and enabled by what he is thinking. He acts the way he does because he thinks the way he does. Esau sells his birthright because in his heart he despises it.

How does that happen? His heart has defined and described the birthright in such a way that he does not value it. Instead of being something he truly desires it is something he despises. This is not some appetite driven, momentary lapse. He trades away something he has come to despise. In his heart and mind, it is truly no more important than a bowl of food. Sin has a way of making us stupid. Esau became numb to what was really important and blind to the consequences of his foolishness.

We do this as well. We define in our hearts what we believe to be truths and treasures. We then desire, move towards, pursue what we value; and we push away, move back from what we despise. The great danger is when we fail to believe what God says, agree with Him about what is true and what is a treasure. When this happens, you will not desire nor choose what pleases God. And like Esau, you may well dismiss what is actually of great spiritual or practical importance.

People often allow their appetites to control them.

The second principle is that people often allow their appetites and passions to control them. Again, people are not controlled by their bodies. An appetite for drink, food or sex is simply a bodily function. But to be controlled by one or more of these is a heart problem. In other words, if I desire food or sex in such a way that I sin, it is because my heart is sinful and depraved, not because my body controls me. My bodily passions are controlled by and follow after my heart's desires. And over time, my heart's desires become the slave of my bodily appetites.

So Esau may have been famished and hungry. Jacob's soup may have been delicious and savory. But he is willing to make the trade at the moment because his heart does not value the importance of his inheritance and spiritual heritage. When people become the slave of the union of their inner and outer appetites, then they are vulnerable to being used by people, tempted by sin and attacked by Satan.

Praise be to God, we do have to be the slave of our appetites, our inner and outer desires. Romans 6 says that we have been crucified with our Redeemer so that we have been delivered from the power of the flesh, the old man we used to be. But, if we continue to present as a heart choice, the members of our body as a physical instrument to sin, we can once again become enslaved to sin even though it has no power over us. So, yield yourself and your body to God so that you are mastered, in heart and body, by your great and gracious King.

Wanting even a good thing too much will cause you to sin.

A third principle to consider is that wanting even a good thing too much will cause you to sin. Jacob clearly illustrates something we say to people all the time in counseling. A good thing, a good want can become a bad master. Even an idol when you want it so badly you will sin to get it, or sin when you don't have it. These idolatrous wants are most often

couched in “need” words. Instead of saying, I want food, love, marital intimacy, success, obedient children we will say, “I need...” This want, pretending to be a need, will then cause us either to commit a sin to gain what we wanted. Or, it may cause us to sin when we are unable to get it.

This is what is going on with Jacob. He wants the inheritance. It may even be his because of God’s Word. But he wants it so badly he will connive, scheme, trap and take advantage of his brother’s sinful weakness to get it. And so will you. We are not now talking about wanting an evil thing, but rather wanting what appears to be good and godly. It is a good thing to want to provide for my family. It is a terrible thing to exchange those relationships for a job that keeps me from keeping them and caring for them. It is a good thing to want obedient children. But that can master us or become idolatrous in such a way that we are harsh and crush them for the sake of good behavior.

How many husbands, loving peace too much, have stopped confronting their wife or children? Maybe those bills are getting harder to pay, so cutting corners or cheating your employer a little will help you get ahead. Maybe your husband just won’t lead the family like he should so you nag him or you are sullen and angry. Brothers and sisters, even wanting a good thing must be bowed to Jesus, submitted to His perfect will.

Jesus is a contrast to both Jacob and Esau.

The next principle is that Jesus is a contrast to both Jacob and Esau. You see Jesus has a high regard for the treasures His Father has defined for Him. So much so that He was willing to give up His own life to secure that treasure, the salvation of His people. Further, He is willing to wait for the full inheritance until the Father is pleased to bring it to fulfillment. He does not chafe or resist or seek to circumvent the Father’s will. He is ever and always bowed to the will of His Father. So He does not despise the great inheritance His Father planned for Him nor does He pursue in ways that are displeasing to His Father. Are we willing to follow His example?

God is sovereign even over our sin.

The last principle is a difficult, but hope giving truth. God is sovereign even over our sin. God is going to elevate Jacob over Esau. He has chosen to love Jacob and hate Esau. He has done so, not in view of what they would become, their potential, or worth; but simply because He is free to love whomever He chooses. This is what the story of Esau, the response of Malachi and the teaching of Paul in Romans clearly tells us.

But, in accomplishing what He has purposed, God gathers up all our sin into that plan. He did not make Esau despise his birthright. He did not cause Jacob to manipulate Esau. But He worked their sin into His sovereign plan. Thus, through the sin of despising and discounting his inheritance and through the sin of deceiving and taking advantage of his brother, God’s will is accomplished. God is far greater than our sin.

Now look, if you deny this, then you will have to deny the cross. God, from eternity past planned the fall, the cross and our redemption in history. He planned for Jesus to die on a certain day at the hands of certain people. The sin of the Jews, the Romans, and even the disciples all wove the tapestry of Jesus’ death on the cross. Yet, every sinner who participated in Jesus’ death is held accountable for their sin. Listen to what Peter says in Acts 2:22-23. *Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with*

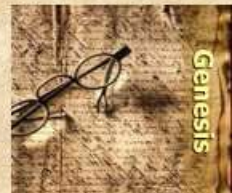
mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know – 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. [ESV] God delivered Jesus to the cross through His plan; yes, wicked people executed that plan and they, not God, are accountable for their wickedness. But that does not negate the sovereignty of God to bring about his plan of salvation.

Now why is this a great, hope giving truth? It is a wonderful thing to know, that while I am accountable for my sin, God is never thwarted by it. He has woven into the tapestry of my and all who touch it. God can use your sin and even the sins of others to expose what is in your heart to bring about his glory. This is a measure of God's greatness and grace to us. We have such peace, not to minimize our sin in the past or to excuse the possibility of sin in the future, but rather to know that God's purposes and plans are moving with complete perfection to the final day.

Study in Genesis

Reflect and Respond

- ✦ A final and sobering warning from Hebrews 12:14-17
- ✦ Conflict and sin can destroy your life and relationships
- ✦ Do not fail to obtain the enabling grace of God
- ✦ The eternal value of your inheritance in Christ greatly surpasses and satisfies more than any temporary pleasure you may find in feeding your appetite for pride and pleasure



One final and sobering warning over the life of Esau comes from the sermon that we know as the book of Hebrews.

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; ¹⁶ that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷ For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. Hebrews 12:14-17

Conflict and sin can destroy your life and relationships with consequences you may be unable to change. Esau was profane, unholy, despising what was spiritually important and so sold his

birthright for a little bowl of soup. The consequences for him were irreparable. We will see that he had great regret. But he could not change what had happened.

So, do not fail to obtain the enabling grace of God. Use every means to get it. Pray and plead for God for the grace to treasure what He treasures. Use every opportunity to exercise it. For the love of God and sake of your souls, do not despise what is truly important lest you come to a sad day when you reap what you have sown. In your moment of temptation, remember that the eternal value of your inheritance in Christ greatly surpasses and satisfies more than any temporary pleasure you may find in feeding your appetite for pride and pleasure. The sweetest contentment and joy is found in treasuring Christ.

Let us pray.