

Sermon Study Guide

Pastor: Ashwin Ramani

Date: March 5/6'16

THE MAIN THING: Every major decision we arrive at in life makes a difference – either good or bad. Our decisions can positively or negatively affect not just our own lives, but future generations.

PURSUE RELATIONSHIP: *Opportunities to connect and pray as a group*
(Choose two questions)

1. What was/is your relationship with your siblings? Did your parents show favoritism?
2. What is the meaning of your name? Why was this name picked for you?
3. Was there a decision in your lineage that still affects your life today?
4. Is there any importance of 'birthright' today?

PURSUE GOD: *Time that is devoted to the Word of God*

Before you begin the Bible study, read Genesis 26:34 – 28:9
(if time allows, Genesis 32, 33 also)

1. What decisions (or non-decisions!) did each of the characters make in this part of the story? What more do we learn about their family dynamics?
2. How were the decisions that were made, short sighted? What were the immediate benefits for Jacob and Esau? What was lost?
3. Review the importance of the 'birthright' (cp. Gen 25:5)
(Read any footnotes you have.)
What does it mean that 'Esau despised his birthright' (Gen. 25:34 b)
(check out different translations for other expressions)
How is the birthright the central point of the story?
4. How did the decisions Jacob had made throughout his life lead him to his face-to-face encounter with God's presence?
How did the encounter affect generations after him? (Gen 32:28)
How does it affect each of us today?

PURSUE MISSION: *Seek to be the community of God's people in your community as you live out your calling.'*

1. Which character do you identify with: Jacob, Esau, or Israel? Why?
2. Pastor Ashwin stated, 'For Esau, a plate of stew seemed more important than a place in the purpose of God!' Discuss the meaning of the statement.
Can you identify with such a decision?
What steps are needed to take you and those who were / will be affected back to God's purpose?

THE WORD (NIV)

Genesis 25:5, 19-34

⁵ Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac... ¹⁹ This is the account of the family line of Abraham's son Isaac. Abraham became the father of Isaac, ²⁰ and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram^[a] and sister of Laban the Aramean. ²¹ Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. ²² The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. ²³ The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger." ²⁴ When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. ²⁵ The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. ^[b] ²⁶ After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. ^[c] Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them. ²⁷ The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents. ²⁸ Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. ²⁹ Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. ³⁰ He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom. ³¹ Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." ³² "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?" ³³ But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.

Genesis 32:27,28

²⁷ The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. ²⁸ Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

Sermon Study Summary

Often when two stories are presented together side by side in the Bible, one is a positive example and the other negative. So it is with Jacob and Esau. During the pregnancy, God said to Rebekah, their mother, that she was carrying two nations in her womb. As brothers — and twins, they had little in common. The firstborn (Esau) meant 'hairy', while his brother (Jacob) meant 'heel grabber'. As they grew, Esau was a successful hunter and woodsman, while Jacob remained at home tending the family business. Because of these characteristics, parental favoritism arose. Esau was loved by his father, while Rebekah loved Jacob. (Gen 25:19-34.)

The rivalry continued into their adult lives when Jacob bargained the birthright away from his elder brother Esau over a pot of stew. The birthright was important. It guaranteed a double portion to its holder. As well, the one with the birthright would inherit leadership of the whole extended family. Here, however, it was not simply a matter of honor and prestige. At the heart of it was God's covenant promise that he had given to Abraham and those spiritual blessings would be transferred from one generation to another. It was through this lineage that God would reveal Himself to the world.

And Esau sold it. His appetites were awakened and he lost sight of what was truly valuable. He was willing to lay down his most prized possession to satisfy his hunger. His quest was to instantly gratify his desire and in that quest everything else completely blurred and became insignificant. A plate of stew seemed more important than a place in the purpose of God and he gave no thought to what this would mean for his future generations (Heb 12:16-17).

How does this apply to us? In a world of instant gratification, we can be tempted each day to throw away our prized possessions for cheap, worthless substitutes. We can become blinded to the consequences because all we can see is the immediate pleasure and satisfaction it could bring. Look at what Esau lost. He lost a place in the chosen lineage of God. The God of the universe would have identified Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Esau. He would have been in the recorded genealogy of Jesus. Instead, his descendants living in Edom became enemies of God's people. Herod the Great was part of that lineage. This was the consequence of throwing away his most prized possession for a bowl of stew. Thus, when you make decisions do not just look for the short-term benefits. Look to the future to see the long-term implications of your decision and how it will impact the spiritual lives of your children. What hangs in the balance in your decisions? Your choices have the power to rob or give life to the destiny the Lord has for you and that of the generations to come.

Now let us look at Jacob. There was little that was commendable in his life. He was self-sufficient and refused to be second. He took advantage of his brother's weakness and later deceived his father to get his blessing. He strove for 20 years before the defining moment came that changed his life and destiny — where he wrestled with God (Gen 32:27-28). In His resultant question, God was not looking for Jacob's name, but his confession of what kind of man he was. The last time he was asked that question, Jacob lied to his father. Now he spoke the truth. And from it, God gave him the name Israel. It means 'God fights.' It was a statement that meant that God was no longer going to fight 'against' Jacob but 'for' Jacob. In his repentance Jacob came into alignment with God's plan and blessing. More amazingly, through Jacob would come a nation who would reveal God to the world and be a light in the darkness to bless the nations through a descendant — Jesus. That was the power of one decision where a con artist turned wholeheartedly to God.

If it happened to Jacob it could happen to any of us. It does not matter how many bad decisions we have made. As you surrender to God and honor him, God will be pleased to bless you and the generations after you. In doing so, you will leave an inheritance for your children that really matters. Jonathan Edwards was part of the Great Awakening in the US in the 1700's. Out of his family tree there were over 300 notable persons including Senators and governors, missionaries and lawyers, judges and professors. A man named Max Jukes lived about the same time as Jonathan Edwards. His life was not unlike that of Esau. Out of his family tree came a high number of alcoholics, prostitutes, and criminals — 42 alone in the New York prison system.

Yet you are not locked into being a product of your ancestry. Not all of Edward's descendants were godly, and not all of Jukes' descendants were derelicts, though there is a Biblical principle behind this (Ex 20:5-6) where the lifestyle of the parents is passed on to their children. Repentance and turning to God breaks that cycle, washing you in the blood of the Lamb by the Holy Spirit. His grace lasts much, much longer than His wrath. With whom do you identify most? Esau, on the verge of giving away your prized possession for a bowl of stew, Jacob, living in your own strength and needing to surrender to God, or Israel, leaving a Godly legacy?