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Birthrights

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Today we are going to take a look at the story of Jacob and Esau. The story of two brothers, one who has his mind on the spiritual, and one who has his mind only on the things of this world.

Our story begins in Genesis 25:27. The full story begins a few verses earlier, and we will get to that, just bear with me. In Genesis 25:27 we read:

“When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents.”

So even though these brothers were twins, their lives take very different paths. Esau is the physical type, while Jacob is more thoughtful, devoting himself to knowledge. Now don't read too much into what I am saying here. There is nothing wrong with devoting oneself to the physical; after-all, our spirit dwells in our God-given bodies, we need to exercise and take care of them (I understand that more than most). However, when you devote yourself solely to your body to where you are completely wrapped-up in its every whim, it becomes a stumbling-block as we will soon see. Take a look at verses 29 and 30:

“Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. And Esau said to Jacob, ‘Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!’ (Therefore his name was called Edom.)”

The meaning of the word “Edom” is: red, earthy; of blood. In other words: fleshly. Esau was a skillful hunter, he was coming back with game that was going to be cooked; but he saw the stew his brother was cooking and decided he couldn't wait for the game to be cooked. Notice also that he did not ask politely for the stew, but rather made more of a demand for it, which gives further testimony of his fleshly-minded character.

In contrast, Jacob has his mind on spiritual things... He wants his brothers' birthright. Now the goal of our study today is not to judge whether it is right or wrong for Jacob to covet what his brother has, the Ten Commandments clearly state not to covet, so we know that answer. It is simply enough to know that Jacob wants Esau's birthright.

What exactly is a birthright? Modern language has changed the meaning of the word very much. To put it as simply as possible: a birthright was a special privilege of the firstborn children to receive a blessing from their father at the appointed time. The blessing would give them prosperity spiritually, mentally and physically; and God would actually honor

the blessing given by the father of the children (so long as it didn't violate His laws). The birthright was actually deeply rooted in spiritually as evidenced by God honoring it.

So here was Esau, yielding to his bodily cravings for his brothers' food, and Jacob seeing an opportunity... Verses 31-34 continue:

“Jacob said, ‘Sell me your birthright now.’ Esau said, ‘I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?’. Jacob said, ‘Swear to me now.’ So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.”

Now honestly... would Esau have died if he didn't eat the stew that very moment? Of course not; but he was so completely enthralled in the throes of his fleshly desires that he felt like he would indeed die. The truth is, every intense desire makes a person feel the same way, and it is up to us to control our feelings and to be a good judge of what our bodies truly need and also what our bodies can do without.

Esau valued physical satisfaction over spiritual blessings. Esau sought after the quick fix, instead of holding out a little longer for the much more valuable rewards.

The story reaches its climax in Genesis [chapter 27] when Esau is robbed of the blessing he so easily forfeit earlier. Indeed every act of sin carries a consequence after it is committed, and Esau was no exception.

Conclusion and final thoughts

Now permit this question... Earlier, God had prophesied about Jacob and Esau saying in Genesis 25:23:

“And the LORD said to her, ‘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.’”

I ask you, who truly was the stronger one? Esau, the skilled hunter, with his mind only on this physical world? Or is it Jacob, the quiet one with his mind on the spiritual?

Many people have stated that Esau was foolish, and that they would never make that same mistake... Yet that is exactly what we all do when we sin. We are trading spiritual blessings for moments of earthly, fleshly pleasure. I urge you all today to rise to the challenge! Crucify your body in Christ and resist the temptation to sin. Resist the cry of your body for pleasure and make the difficult choice to wait for your true blessings; they will come.

