

Jacob 1 - The Birthright

In previous messages, we began studying the book of Genesis. When we read Genesis, we are reading about all those things that formed the foundation of God's plan of redemption. Genesis has been described as *The Book of Firsts*. You could say, "In the beginning was the first darkness, the first light, the first work, the first rest, the first marriage, the first sin, the first sacrifice, the first promise of the Messiah, the first man to die, the first man not to die, the first human religion, the first government, the first envy, the first murder, the first civilization, the first covenant with God, and the first people of God." Every kind of problem and human situation is given to us from the beginning. Genesis sets the stage of history that will find its completion in the Revelation. The problem of sin is introduced in the beginning and its *resolution* is completed in the Revelation. Starting in Genesis 1 God takes us through the stages that finally brings closure in Revelation 22.

As we moved through the Beginnings of Genesis, we began to focus on the patriarchs as the book expanded into the narrative of the beginnings of Israel. We finished up with the life of Abraham and Isaac and took a break for messages pertaining to the holiday season. In Gen 25, we come to the birth of Abraham's grandchildren, Esau and Jacob. Even though Abraham lived to see them reach the age of about 15, the life of Jacob forms a new narrative. Today, we are moving forward as we examine the life of Jacob.

1. God's Plan

At the foundation of the life of Jacob is a statement from God that carries God's purpose into the next generation. Rebekah wondered about the difficulty she was having during her pregnancy.

Gen 25:19-23 And these *are* the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham begat Isaac:
20And Isaac was forty years old

when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padanaram, the sister to Laban the Syrian.

21And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she *was* barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

22And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If *it be* so, why *am* I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD.

23And the LORD said unto her, Two nations *are* in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and *the one* people shall be stronger than *the other* people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

God indicated that this was all due to how their birth fit into His larger scheme of redemptive history. Notice that there was no condemnation of Esau here. There was nothing *he* had done that his people *deserved* to serve the people of the younger. There was no approval of Jacob or anything *he* had done. At this point, the prophecy was merely descriptive. When God *did* choose to use Israel, it was going to be because it fit into *His* plan, not according to anything that either one had done to deserve the plan.

Rom 9:10-16 And not only *this*; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, *even* by our father Isaac;

11(For *the children* being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)

12It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.

13As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

14What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God?

God forbid.

15For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

16So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

Don't get too alarmed by the reference to God hating Esau and loving Jacob. The original prophecy Paul is referring to is found in Malachi. Malachi was not talking about Jacob and Esau personally. We tend to think of the word *hate* in its negative moral sense. As the context of Malachi reveals, hate is understood in its sense of judgment. Malachi was referring to how the nation that *came* from Esau who went off into idolatry was judged by God and rejected. Israel, the nation that came from *Jacob* was sustained and promoted by God's grace. Paul explained that God merely had a plan where He chose to use Jacob, not according to anything Jacob had willed or how he ran his life, it was all according to God's mercy for how He was going to bring salvation to the world. God's plan is not affected by who He chooses to carry it out. God chose Jacob while he was yet a sinner, and also Paul. But God also chose some others while they were yet a sinner and then *stayed* a sinner, like Pharaoh and Judas Iscariot (have I not chosen you and one of you is...) He also chose some people who did get saved, but were screw ups who fulfilled God's purpose, some to a large degree like Samson and Solomon, others in significant events like David, Moses, Aaron, Uzziah.

But there is another message in here that we have to be careful to notice. The account goes on to describe the twins birth.

Gen 25:24-26 And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, *there were* twins in her womb.

25And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and

they called his name Esau.

26 And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac *was* threescore years old when she bare them.

This is almost like watching a mystery movie where some seemingly insignificant detail is included at the beginning of the movie. Later on, that detail turns out to be the key to solving the mystery. This detail about Jacob grasping Esau's heel certainly is a key to understanding God's mystery of salvation, but it's not like a movie being played out. In a movie, the scriptwriters know how everything fits together. From Moses' or Isaac's point of view, Jacob grasping Esau's heel was perhaps nothing more than a curious event. And then, you have to wonder how much Moses knew how significant this detail was. Moses did indeed write the book of Genesis, but only by the inspiration of God. Moses *not* like a modern movie script writer. God, as the true author of the Scriptures, planted this and other similar details in the script all over the place which is confirmation to us that the Bible is not just a human book. This motif is repeated in Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Reuben and Judah, Pharez and Zarah, Mannaseh and Ephraim, Saul and David, and Adonijah and Solomon. The principle of the former replaced by the later is a pervasive principle in the Scripture: The Old Testament and the New Testament, The first Adam and the second Adam (Jesus), The Old Covenant and the New Covenant, night and day (as opposed to day and night), Martha and Mary, Israel and the Church, Law and Grace, the kingdom of Israel and the Millennium, the old earth and the new earth, the flesh birth and the spiritual birth...

Heb 10:8-9 Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and *offering* for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure *therein*; which are

offered by the law;

9Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

This principle is worthy of a whole book, let alone a sermon, by itself, but I will choose one passage to sum it up:

John 3:1-7 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

2The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

3Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

4Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

5Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

Of all the miracles that Nicodemus noted in the power of God, Jesus pointed out that the greatest miracle and the only one that really counted was the new birth. Nicodemus was born of the flesh and needed the replacement, the new spirit. The old man is judged by the law, but the new man is freed by grace. Just as it was written that the elder shall *serve* the younger, the same thing can be said about how the Law, the Ten Commandments and all the other law given through Moses, *serves* grace.

Gal 3:23-24 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Gal 4:1-7 Now I say, *That* the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;

2 But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.

3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:

4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

The role of a schoolmaster is explained in ch. 4 as a tutor or governor in the culture of the day, not like a principle in a modern school. The tutor *instructed* the student. Before a child would be actually legally adopted by his own father and receive his birthright inheritance, he had to be brought up by instruction. The Law as a tutor informed us what sin is and instructed us how we are sinners. Before we could become a child of God, we had to receive the instruction of the Law that we are sinners and need to be saved by grace.

Honest people will recognize that they can't be saved by how good they are. Most people know enough to be ashamed of pride and will with genuine humility say, "No, I know I'm not good enough. I

could never be good enough." And yet those same people think that you have to be good enough by their works to go to heaven. How could they say that their good works could save them when they in humility they know in their heart that they could never be good enough? The only way to glory is to receive God's grace and accept Christ.

The next section of Scripture describes how Jacob and Esau related to God's plan. We need to compare our hearts to how they dealt with their situation.

2. *Neither one* had a proper appreciation

Gen 25:27-34 And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob *was* a plain man, dwelling in tents.

28And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of *his* venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29And Jacob *sod* pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he *was* faint:

30And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red *pottage*; for I *am* faint: therefore was his name called Edom.

31And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.

32And Esau said, Behold, I *am* at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?

33And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob.

34Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised *his* birthright.

In this setting, Esau sold his birthright. A birthright was something that is still common today in what they call *intestate succession*. *Intestate* means "without testimony." In other words, if

you die without a "last will and testimony," or a final legal *testimony* of what your will is concerning who gets your property, then there are laws as to who stands next in line. These are called the laws of succession, or who rises to the top of the list of legal inheritors. Today, a spouse is the first choice, but if no spouse, then the children get an *equal* share. If there are no children, then other laws determine who is next in line. Even in Isaac's day, the children were to all get an inheritance, but the law was that the oldest son's birthright was automatically superior to all other children's rights.

There were several things associated with the eldest son's birthright. First, he became the head of the family and was spiritually responsible for it with a priestly function. The first-born son was especially consecrated (or given-over) to God. He would have the privilege of representing his family before God as the priest of the family. Later on, that privilege would be transferred to the tribe of Levi in Israel (Numbers 3). But in Esau's day, the priesthood still belonged to the first-born. So when Esau sold his birthright, he gave up the priesthood.

Secondly, the oldest son was given a double portion of the property. By giving up his birthright, Esau was giving up any right to the land that was promised to Isaac.

Thirdly, he gave up his authority as head of the whole family. You see, in his father's absence, the first-born son had authority over his younger siblings. With that authority came the responsibility to provide for his mother till her death, and for his unmarried sisters until they got married. Perhaps that is why he got a double portion of the estate – so he could provide for his mother and sisters.

Later on, we are going to see that Jacob also connives to take Esau's blessing as well. What a bitter blow for Esau!

Gen 27:34-37 And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, *even* me also, O

my father.

35And he said, Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing.

36And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?

37And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son?

So you have to ask, "What is the difference between the birthright and the blessing?" Legally, they have the same outcome: someone gets the inheritance. The difference is that the birthright would only be exercised if Isaac had not offered the inheritance by way of giving a *blessing*, or in other words if he died *intestate*. Even though Jacob bought the birthright from Esau, Isaac's blessing would act like a will and override the birthright. As with many sins, people will claim some bit of justification as an excuse. Jacob had a *right* to the inheritance, but *only* up to a point.

At this stage, we are only talking about the birthright, however, and not the blessing. The problem that is presented here is that neither Esau *nor* Jacob had a proper heart when it came to the birthright.

- Esau *despised* the birthright.

There are just so many things that can be said about Esau's haste that shows why it could be said that he despised his birthright. The enormity of what he was giving up should have contributed to greater caution. A bowl of porridge is nothing in comparison to what he was giving up. It would have been more reasonable for him to take a swipe at Jacob and say, "You brat! Don't be selfish. I'm gonna tell Mom on you."

Being considered the older brother and a man of action, he could have just bossed Jacob. Instead, he let his birthright go so easily. There is no balance, no proportionality. You have to have a pretty bad sense of value to not appreciate what you are giving up. To let hunger be the ruling factor here amplifies the significance of him being a man driven by his appetites.

This is what can make sharing the Gospel so frustrating today. The more we consider how long eternity is and how hot Hell is, when you hear someone say "No, thanks, I'm okay," it is just so baffling. They have no sense of value, no awareness of just what they are giving up. People are more concerned about their comfort zone and satisfying their emotional and physical appetites that they are willing to trade the glory of an eternity with God for a mess of pottage. The application of this attitude is not limited to the lost. The saved can be similarly obtuse or dense. You can constantly preach basic Christian living that people ignore for twenty years and then wake up one day and ask, "What happened? Why is my life a mess?" Too often they fail to change at that point because they don't want to do the work to undo twenty lost years of spiritual growth and discipline.

- Jacob wanted to appropriate the birthright by unscrupulous means.

Jacob is no better than Esau. It will be sometime before God gets a hold of his heart. It might be said that Jacob had a better sense of value, but only on the material worth of the birthright. His sense of moral value was terrible.

According to modern contract law, there are several factors that make a contract valid. One of the things that can invalidate a contract is if one of the parties is coerced into making the contract. A mobster's contract with a store owner to provide protection is invalid, for example if the mobster is the one he is protecting the store owner from. Even if his means were considered legal in his day, we can see that at the

very least, Jacob was unethical by offering to buy Esau's birthright while Esau was under duress and fainting with hunger.

This attitude can be seen in those who are lost today when they try to take hold of salvation while avoiding God's requirements for salvation. They don't want to have to repent. They want to offer pottage of works to God and tell Him to be happy with their offering. Offering pottage to Esau might have worked with him, but God is not going to accept that. God cannot be manipulated, coerced, enticed, cajoled, deceived, or whatever else. He is the one who has the birthright of being a child of God and it has to be on His terms. It's even more odd that people won't come to Christ knowing that God will satisfy our spiritual hunger and pay the price for our birthright Himself.

Just as the lost can get this so wrong, the immature Christian can rob himself of joy by trying to achieve it by what seems right to him.

Prov 14:12 There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.

Prov 12:15 The way of a fool *is* right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel *is* wise.

Prov 26:12 Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? *there is* more hope of a fool than of him.

Prov 12:15 The way of a fool *is* right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel *is* wise.

Neither Jacob nor Esau had a proper appreciation for the birthright. The birthright *we* are offered is the birthright we can have when we become a child of God. Where is our heart today? Is someone an Esau with no value on the birthright we have in Christ? Are you lost and on your way to Hell because you won't consider eternity and be honest with yourself before God? Or perhaps

you are a child of God but are held back from God's blessings because you are busy chasing off after the things of this world that do not satisfy? Perhaps someone is Jacob, depending on his own fleshly wisdom and skill, trying to manipulate God and others, not willing to seek out that discipline to do things God's way.

1. God's Plan Gen 25:19-23, Rom 9:10-16, Gen 25:24-26, Heb 10:8-9, John 3:1-7, Gal 3:23-24, Gal 4:1-7
2. Neither one had a proper appreciation Gen 25:27-34, Gen 27:34-37, Prov 14:12, Prov 12:15, Prov 26:12, Prov 12:15