

## SO MUCH LOST, SO LITTLE GAINED

"Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." Hebrews 12:16-17

Isaac and Rebekah had twin sons, Esau and Jacob, and they were as unlike as two boys could be, though children of the same parents, and brought up in the same home and in the same environment. Esau and Jacob also differed in regard to the paternal affection bestowed upon them. Esau was his father's favorite, and Jacob was his mother's favorite. Perhaps Isaac, the quiet and passive man, saw in Esau, the bold hunter, the energetic nature of the woman whom he had loved as a wife all those years. Quite likely Rebekah, the strong, self-assertive woman, saw in gentle Jacob the quiet and passive nature of her husband whom she had loved so long. It is often found that the father loves the boy or girl who resembles the mother, while the mother is frequently found to favor the boy or girl whose nature is most akin to the father. However, when partiality is shown trouble results. Favoritism is wrong and makes for jealousy in the family.

Few characters are more profitable for study than Esau. The privileges and perils, temper and tragedies of Esau reveals us to ourselves. Had Esau been less attractive, his prospects less brilliant, his fall would have excited less pity, and his doom would have seemed less terrible. It is because there was so much in him to admire that our interest in him abides.

Esau possessed many admirable qualities or characteristics that tend to make him welcome in the society of our day and of any day.

### 1. Esau had a splendid physique.

He was big and strong and rugged. He was a man of the field, lived in the open and communed with nature. The tan of summer suns was upon his face. The strength and elasticity of many a mountain climb was in his limbs. He had the graceful and easy movements of the athlete.

### 2. Esau had great physical courage.

Physically he was unafraid. Rich in physical strength and courage, he would have made an admirable man for a football team.

### 3. Esau was a cunning hunter.

He was a good sport. A gun, a day in the hills, some game and a good meal were all that he craved.

### 4. Esau was sensual.

He was a creature of the moment. His nature was too shallow for anything deep to take root. He allowed his physical appetites to overrule the higher instincts of his nature. Everything but the material was unreal to him. Esau never learned to tame his tongue, train his temper or master his motives.

I want us to take a close look at this man who lost so much and gained so little. Unless we profit by his example, we, too, are going to lose so much and gain so little in life.

It is an obvious fact in the life of any church that there are members who go so far and then somehow or other they drop out of the ranks of those who play any significant part in

the work of Christ. So often the most promising young people, who begin so extremely well, suddenly disappear, and others with ordinary abilities emerge and through dedication and dependability become significant in the life of the church. To keep others from making this tragic mistake I am directing the attention of all listeners to Esau "who for a single meal parted with his birthright." Three things should give us some insight into his experience and be of real benefit to us.

## I. Whom Esau Loved.

At the very center of his affections was Esau himself. He loved himself. Consequently, he was self-centered. Two things contributed to his self-centeredness.

### 1. The fuel of his importance.

Esau was important. He was a cunning and skillful hunter. That fact seems to imply that he was both the protector and the provider in the home. When the flocks were in danger from savage beasts, all the family instinctively turned to Esau. When food was required, especially the kind that would satisfy the taste of Isaac, Esau was the man to get it. Esau was confident and felt important. Very subtly this added fuel to the flame of self-love. The more gifted or talented or confident a person is, the more fuel is added to his concept and estimate of himself.

### 2. The fact of his indulgence.

To him what mattered most was what Esau wanted. What he wanted, Esau must have. I wonder if this is not true of some of us! The principle by which some of us live is that what we want we must have.

When Esau returned from a hunting expedition in the hills, with his trophies hanging over his shoulder, his keen appetite clamored for immediate satisfaction. As he approached the tent, his nostrils caught the savory odor of the beans that his brother was cooking. The aroma from his favorite dish assailed his nostrils and he wanted to eat at once! He decided that he must have some of that food at any price.

Esau continued to have that spirit in life. Later, he met an attractive girl, and then another, and he resolved to have them for himself regardless of the consequences. The fact that they were heathen was set aside. Because he wanted them he must have them. The fact that such marriages would hurt and grieve his parents was irrelevant. From Genesis 26:34-35 we read, "And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite: Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah."

Basically, Esau loved himself. That same thing is true of people who call themselves Christians and attempt to engage in the service of the Lord. Basically, what really matters is just ourselves, and all our work and the context of it is very little more than a framework and a setting in which our self-love, our self-importance and our self-indulgence can have their sway and full play. Like Esau, we are often in love with ourselves.

## II. What Esau Lacked.

There were two things that Esau lacked which spelled disaster in his life.

### 1. Discernment.

Esau's lack of discernment was evidenced by his willingness to sell his birthright for a single meal to satisfy the momentary hunger of his body. How foolish he was!

What a fantastic lack of any sense of values! Esau failed to discern between:

(1) The passing and the permanent.

With him it was the satisfaction of the momentary hunger of his body. How swiftly the satisfaction passed! "He did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright" (Genesis 25:34). Thus he had a few minutes' delight, and a lifetime of regret. How short-lived is the satisfaction of self-indulgence. What a pity that anybody should fail to discern between the passing and the permanent!

Is your future usefulness in the service of God and others in jeopardy because you are indulging in the spirit of resentment, bitterness, malice, anger and lust? It is easy for a Christian to lose his temper, and lose his testimony with it. Lustful self-indulgence is folly, and frequently results in a lifetime of regret. Do not fail to discern between the passing and the permanent.

(2) The present and the future.

Esau never looked beyond the gratification of his fleshly appetite. A bowl of red beans was very important to him then, but the birthright was unimportant in his case because it seemed so far in the future. Esau played the part of a fool by thinking that the present minutes were more important than the future years. We have seen this in the case of many children. We observe them playing instead of working at their studies. Examinations seem remote, college seems far off and life's calling seems almost beyond sight. So he has fun only in the present, but he has many regrets in the future. Esau had no vision of the future whatsoever. He reasoned that if he died of hunger the birthright would not be of any profit to him. He did not look beyond the tomb. All that he cared about was the present.

It would be very easy to dramatize the life of Esau. It would require only two articles -- a dish of red beans and a coffin. It would not take a genius to play the part of Esau. In fact, any animal that could eat, walk and die could play his part for it was said of him, "he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way."

(3) The paltry and the costly.

Due to his lack of discernment, a bowl of pottage meant more to Esau than did his birthright. Esau knew full well the significance of the birthright. He knew that it carried with it the special covenant, special care and special commission of God. It meant pre-eminence in the family by virtue of the fact that it entailed a double share in the inheritance of the father's estate. It also meant that he, the firstborn, would perform the functions of a priest in the family, thus being the depository and communicator of the divine secrets. It also meant that the one who possessed it would be the progenitor of the Messiah. In other words, he would constitute a link in the line of descent by which the Messiah was to be born into the world.

Esau reveals the danger of one's weak moments, and warns us of how much can be thrown away at one time, never again to be recovered. In the moment of temptation he threw away his birthright. It is solemnizing to remember that in the last analysis people are tested and judged, not by their excellencies or so-called strong points, but by their weak points. A chain is just as strong as the weakest link in it, and the same thing is true of a man's character. Satan knows our weak places, and it is in them that he assails us. Jacob made his proposal to Esau when he came in from the fields, faint and hungry.

## 2. Discipline.

Here was a man that recognized no authority except his own. This is a basic mark of the unsaved in our day. Paul described the Ephesians before they were saved as those who fulfilled the desires of the flesh and of the mind. That is to say, the basic principle upon which they lived was that they did what they wanted to do. That is the mark of the worldly man: he does what he wants to do. It is not the mark of the true Christian, for he says, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

To Esau life meant just what he personally got out of it. But before you criticize him, look at yourself. Have you done any better in your own life? Why was Esau such a failure?

### (1) He was a sensualist.

His life was dominated by the flesh. He lived only for this world and what he could get out of it. He had no sense of the spiritual or appreciation of the unseen. He sacrificed spiritual interests to sensual appetites. He had no thought or time or place for God. He did not give any consideration to the future.

### (2) He was a profane person.

A profane person treats sacred things lightly. He saw nothing of value except what he could touch or enjoy.

Esau lived a life of self-pleasing. Multitudes of professing Christians today are living by the same principle. They are pleasing themselves. They please themselves whether they go to church once or twice on a Sunday; whether they go to the prayer meeting or not; whether they read the Bible or not; and concerning the stewardship of their money. They are exactly like Esau. He did exactly what he wanted to do, and most people are doing the same today. How different was the spirit and attitude of our Lord who said, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). Christ also said, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34).

Esau was a man who patterned his life on the whim of the moment and the mood of his heart, instead of the will of his God. What he lacked was discernment and discipline.

## III. What He Lost.

### 1. The delight that he was meant to give to others.

"He became a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah." Are you a grief or a delight to your parents?

### 2. The destiny that he was meant to fulfill.

Esau did this when he sold his birthright. That was a deed which he could not undo. "For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (Hebrews 12:17).

But there came a time when Esau was dissatisfied with the trade that he had made. That comes in every life. No man can be satisfied with a sensual life, or a profane life, that is a life lived apart from God. One day he saw the value of what he had thrown away. He realized the kind of man he might have been, but then could not be. "For ye know how that

afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (Hebrews 12:17). There is a time when it is too late to weep. May God grant that that time will never come in your life. Do not sell out your enjoyment of the riches of your inheritance in Christ for things that are physical, paltry and passing.