

SELLING OUT CHEAP

Genesis 25:27-34; 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 the same environment. From the moment of their birth the sons differed in appearance, and their unlikeness was a symbol of the hostility which characterized their after-life and the history of their descendants. The outward signs were expressive of real differences. Their names were given with reference to the facts which were evident at their birth. Esau was so called because of his hairy aspect, and Jacob from his laying hold of his brother's heel at their very entrance upon life.

Esau and Jacob 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, as in this case. This favoritism was wrong and made for disharmony and jealousy in the family.

Few characters are more profitable for study than Esau. The privileges and perils, temper and tragedies of Esau reveal 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.

No doubt you are well acquainted with Esau. You know him of that far distant yesterday. You also know him of today. There is much that is admirable about him. He has many qualities that we frankly admire. He is possessed of characteristics that tend to make him welcome in the society of our day and of any day.

I. The Characteristics of Esau.

1. He had a splendid physique.

He was big and strong and rugged. He was a big hearty fellow, strong in arm, alert in limb, and keen in eye. 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. He was a fine, upstanding, husky fellow of the sort that makes a pleasing impression upon any crowd in which he chances to be.

2. He had great physical courage.

Physically he was unafraid. He had that type of courage which we admire, but which the bulldog possesses along with some people. In a chase he was ever the leader. In the places of danger he went with a total unconsciousness of fear. He would have made an admirable man for a football team. He was rich in physical strength and courage.

3. He was a cunning hunter. Genesis 25:27.
He became a hunter, a man of the fields, living a rough and rugged life, taking things very much as they came. He was a good sport. A gun, a day in the hills, some game and a good meal were all that he craved. He was never happier than when in the chase after wild game, when he would go as fast and as long as his strength would carry him, utterly unmindful of precaution or of provision for the time when he would be exhausted and hungry after the hunt had ended.
4. He was sensual.
Esau was a creature of the moment. His nature was too shallow for anything deep to take root. Delay and disappointment could not be endured. Everything but the material was unreal to him. He allowed his appetite to overrule the higher instincts of his nature. He never learned to tame his tongue, train his temper, or master his motives. He was easily satisfied. When hungry, he would give anything for a "square meal." Like the drinking man today, who would sell the best thing he had for a drink of whisky.

II. The Crisis for Esau.

1. Esau was very hungry.
On this particular day Esau had been out over the hills on a hunting expedition. In the excitement of the day he had forgotten in some measure his keen hunger. When he returned with his trophies thrown over his shoulder, his appetite clamored for immediate satisfaction. As he came to the tents of his people, his nostrils caught the savory odor of the pottage that his brother, Jacob, was cooking. The fumes went to his brain like the fumes of liquor to the brain of a toper. He must have some of that food at once. So he lifted the flap of his tent and said to his brother, Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red pottage; for I am faint." If Esau was really faint, it indicated too great eagerness in following his sports. Even in honorable callings and profitable pursuits moderation is a duty. If Esau was not really faint, but only fatigued and hungry, it was an instance of exaggerated talking which with some is common, but by all should be avoided.
2. Esau despised his birthright.
He did not rightly value his birthright. He counted it worthless. He said: "What profit is this birthright to me?" It was of no value to him when he esteemed other sensual things of more importance. The pottage to him was the chief thing at that moment. What was the birthright?
 - (1) Not worldly prosperity.
 - (2) Not immunity from sorrow.
 - (3) A spiritual heritage.
It carried with it the special covenant, special care and special commission of God. It meant: --
 - a. Pre-eminence in the family.
A double share in the inheritance of the father's possessions or estate. It practically meant the place of rulership in the family. It also carried with it the honor of receiving first, from the mouth of the father, a peculiar benediction which was never pronounced in vain.

b. Priest of the home.

The first-born performed the functions of a priest in the family. The birthright carried the privilege of being the depositary and communicator of the Divine secrets.

c. Progenitor of the Messiah.

It constituted a link in the line of descent by which the Messiah was to be born into the world.

3. Esau sold out cheap.

The crafty Jacob saw his opportunity to take advantage of the hunger of his brother. He told him that he would give him to eat of the pottage upon the condition that Esau transferred his birthright to him. Jacob knew that Esau did not value the birthright very highly. Being exceedingly anxious to get it away from Esau, and seeing his chance to do so, he made the base proposal to let him have a dish of pottage in return for the birthright. Esau, impulsive and dominated by appetite, was insensible to the spiritual advantages involved and was willing to sacrifice his dearest treasure for a supper. Beans meant more to him than birthright. Pottage meant more to him than principle. Supper meant more to him than did his soul. Esau consented, gulped down the pottage, and the birthright was gone because he had yielded to his appetite. Having sold his birthright, Esau rose from supper without a pang, walked out of the tent and off the stage. We read that "he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright." He ate and drank and went his way. That short sentence tells about all that life meant to Esau. Almost his entire biography was written in that one brief sentence. How little life meant to him! How small was his achievement! As one sees him stumbling off the stage, one cannot refrain from asking him something: "Esau, you are going out into the night. You have lived your life. What have you accomplished? What has life meant to you? What has your life meant to the world?" If one had asked Moses what he had accomplished, he would have pointed to a nation that had been led from bondage to freedom. If one had asked Paul what he had accomplished in his life, he would have pointed to nations which once sat in darkness but had come to the light. But when one asks Esau what he had accomplished, he could only point to an empty dish. What a failure he was!

This instance in the life of Esau warns us of how much can be thrown away in a single moment, never again to be recovered. Esau was no stronger than his weak moments. A man's character is just as strong as the weakest link in it. It is solemnizing to remember that in the last analysis we are judged and tested, not by our excellencies, not by our so-called strong points but by our weak points. The real test will be the trial of your weak place and your weak moment. The battle line of a man's life is just as strong as the weakest place in that line.

The tempter knows our weak places, and those places are where he assails us. Satan did not come to Jesus and ask Him to turn stones into bread on the first day but on the fortieth day when Jesus was hungry. Jacob did not come with his infamous proposal to Esau to barter his birthright when Esau was starting out for the field after a full breakfast. He did not make it the night before or the day following. But he made it just at the time that Esau came in faint and hungry. Esau's hunger gave Jacob his opportunity.

III. The Charge Against Esau.

"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.

1. Esau was a sensualist.

We use this word sensual in a restricted sense today. But as used here, it has a wider meaning. It means that Esau was a slave to the visible, to the tangible, to the physical. He had no sense or appreciation of the spiritual and of the unseen. He sacrificed spiritual interests to sensual appetite. It was not a sin to be hungry. But, it was a sin to let appetite call until conscience was crushed, and to let porridge paralyze principle. The morsel may have been sweet, but the price should have been prohibitive. He sacrificed the blessing for bread.

2. Esau was a profane person.

We are told that Esau was a "profane person". What kind of man do these words bring up to your minds? Most likely you would say one who swears abominably, who uses the holy name of God in careless oaths. And you would be right. He is certainly a profane man, but he is not the only profane man. The root of profanity is something far deeper than that. A profane person is one who treats sacred things lightly.

We must trace this word "profanity" back to its source. In the Old World when men chose some sacred spot for the worship of the gods, they marked out its limits with the greatest care. All that was in the lines was holy ground--the ground outside was not holy. When a building was erected on that sacred spot, the building was called the "fane", meaning the "temple", and the ground in front of the "fane", "profane", meaning outside the sacred limits. Therefore, a "profane" person was one who belonged to the life of the streets--whose thoughts and aims were limited to the interests of the world; one who had no respect for the things for which the temple stood; who saw nothing of value but what he could see or touch or enjoy. Esau's life was unfenced. He did not see the worth of the spiritual. He did not value the unseen. His life did not have any high wall of conviction about it. It was not shut in by any iron grating of principle. Hence, his soul became the galloping ground of any and every foul passion that desired to romp across it.

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. One day he realized the man that he once could have been, but now cannot be. He found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently and with tears.