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Transcript

Bible Stories for Adults – Part 15 – Don't Sell Your Birthright

March 24, 2023

We're continuing our series today, *Bible Stories for Adults*. This is the 15th episode. You might want to go back and look at the series on our Website. That's liferesource.org. The topic today is the story of Esau and his birthright. We called *Don't Sell Your Birthright*.

Esau's father was Isaac. Isaac's father was Abraham. Abraham was the man God chose to work with to advance His plan of salvation. God made a covenant with Abraham – a contract. And in this contract, God made promises – both physical and spiritual – to Abraham. There were four big ones, most people think. One was that the Messiah would come through his descendants. Secondly, he would be wealthy – rich, rich, rich. For those days, he was. Third, his descendants would be numerous. The term *sand of the sea* is used by God to describe how many descendants he would have. And his descendants would control a lot of land, much of which would be strategically located around the globe. So, these promises were all part of what Abraham handed down to Isaac, his son, who also covenanted with God, and what Isaac had to hand down to his firstborn son.

Who was his firstborn son? And would he also covenant with God? Well, let's read about that. Let's start in Genesis 25:19.

Genesis 25:19-23 – *These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah...to be his wife. And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren. And the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. The children struggled together within her, and she said – she didn't know that there were twins there yet – "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. Now, that's unusual for that day and age. The oldest son became the heir of the family. And his birthright was twice as much as the others. So, that was an unusual thing that happened there.*

In verse 24:

V-24-28 – *When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob. And it says: Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field – an outdoors guy – while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. That sounds outdoorsy to us, too, but back then, the studious people lived in tents and the outdoors people lived outdoors. Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.*

Let's think about this for a minute. One was hairy and red – an outdoors man. He was the firstborn. That's Esau. What does that mean? Well, he should have been the one that was stronger and richer and the head of the clan – but we're told that his little brother Jacob came out holding on to his heel. So, that was a portent for the future.

What else can we learn here? Well, while Esau was an outdoorsy guy, who was attracted to hunting and other outdoor activities, his brother Jacob, we're told, was a dweller in tents. The urbane people back then, and the sophisticated – the studious – people lived in tents. They were nomadic. So he did stuff that was more indoors-like. He didn't have a computer, but if he did, he'd probably been working on it. So, Esau would hunt and kill animals, stew and roast them, and give them to his father, Isaac. Because of this Esau was Isaac's favorite. But Rebekah loved Jacob more, we're told. So, that's partiality on the part of both parents, isn't it? I think we *know* what happens when parents commit this sin. It causes competition between the kids. In this case, big brother was top dog, but little brother sought ascendancy. He's got him by the heel when he comes out of the womb.

So, let's continue the story – Genesis 25, verse 29:

V- 29-34 – *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.) Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright now." See, there's this plan, right? He's got him at a disadvantage. So, Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me at this point?" Jacob said, "Swear to me now." So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob – for a pot of stew. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.*

So, Jacob is a name that means *supplanter*. He was always figuring the angles. And he saw his chance there and he took it. His brother was desperate and disadvantaged. So, Jacob took advantage of his desperation, and Esau, thinking he was going to die if he didn't get something to eat, gave up his birthright, as the firstborn, to his little brother.

Now, it says that *Esau despised his birthright* in today's language. That would mean that he didn't value it. All the promises that God made to Abraham were, by law, to come through Esau.

So, this was an incredibly huge deal! But not obvious to Esau yet.

So, if we were to keep reading, we would see that God protected Isaac from all the natives of the land and caused him to be incredibly wealthy. Why? Because of the promise God made that Isaac would inherit from Abraham. And the point is this: If Esau had trusted God, he would have clung to his birthright, because he came out of the womb before Jacob. The birthright was *his*. It was God's gift to him. But what would he do with it? Would he value it? Would he protect it with his life? Esau was in line to be protected and blessed by God. I mean, if the Messiah is to come through your line, then you have to be alive, right? So, no matter how hungry he was, it was irrelevant. God would fulfill that promise to him. God would not have let him die. But Esau didn't get that. So, besides not understanding and not valuing the gift God had given him, this is an added element of faith in God, isn't it?

So, why is this story in the Bible? What are the takeaways for us today – all this time later – 3,500 years later? I think, sometimes, we forget that, while society changes – people think differently – but God *does not*. He's the same now as He was then. The gift of his birthright, from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob – who was called Israel – to the Israel of God today – which is the church, right? – it's all still the same. When God calls you into His church, it's not that you selected it. It's that *He* has selected you and me. And so, that's important! And we're supposed to take care of that. We are called the Israel of God today. So, there's a promise given to us. You can read all about that in the New Testament in the writings of Paul. He explains it well.

The question is: If we were to think like God thinks, what would our birthright be today? And how would we treat it? How much would we value it? How would that gift change our thinking and our behavior?

Let's look in Ephesians 1:3 for a minute. Paul says:

Ephesians 1:3 – *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

V-11 – *In him we have obtained an inheritance.* So, just like Esau, since we're the Israel of God, we also have an inheritance. And it's just as real to God as it was in Esau's day.

So, what is our inheritance? Well, instead of inheriting a lot of sheep and goats, and a lot of land, and being filthy rich, the promise of Christ, coming through our lineage, we have a promise of having all our sins forgiven and living forever with God as God – not as angels, but as God is God. You know, sheep and goats, and being filthy rich, and owning a lot of land, well, they're fine, but eventually, we're going to die and all that physical stuff doesn't do us any good at that point. Somebody else gets it – usually our children. But the covenant God has made with us is called the *New Covenant* – and it's in the Bible – is *way* better than the inheritance Esau was offered – much better promises, much more valuable. And instead of being in a physical family

to be in line for our inheritance, we are in the *Church of God* – the body of Christ, which is our *spiritual* family – the basis from which we receive our inheritance.

Look in Ephesians 2:19.

Ephesians 2:19-20 – *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.* So, if you're in the family, you're an heir. And you *will* receive an inheritance, just like Esau was a part of Isaac's family and was in line to receive the inheritance of the firstborn – but not a physical inheritance, but *eternal* life with God, loved beyond measure, wealthy beyond measure, powerful beyond measure wise beyond measure, love beyond measure, having the ability to have fun beyond measure, and to feel satisfaction beyond measure.

All those things eclipse anything we feel in this life. And since God still thinks the same way He thought back in Esau's day. He is thinking the same about us today. So, the same question comes up in God's mind about us: What are we willing to do to maintain, to keep, to take care of our inheritance? Will we appreciate it? Will we value it? Will we take care of it? Do we get it? Do we understand the value of it? Or, will we be like Esau, focused on how he felt at the moment – focused on his hunger? Or, will we swap it for something that is, by comparison, worthless? What Esau did was way more than stupid – way more stupid than swapping a Lamborghini for a Yugo. If we give up promises that are way better than Esau's for some physical thing, we are even spiritually dumber yet than he was.

So, let's look in Romans 11:29. How did we get to be so lucky? How was it that God called us? God *did* call us, and everyone has his own story about that, and that's His family. And when that happens, we suddenly become heirs of eternal life. It says in Romans 11:29:

Romans 11:29 – *For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.* That word, *irrevocable* – that means that God will never revoke your calling. It's not that He's going to revoke us. He will *never* revoke your calling. Esau was always going to be the firstborn of Isaac. And the reason Esau didn't get the blessing of the firstborn was because he rejected it in a bone-headed decision – one he deeply regretted later, by the way.

So, a calling is like an invitation. Now, we've used that term, so I'm going to define it now. You get an email from a friend, and it says; "Hey, I'm having a slumber party next Thursday. We plan on eating at 5. Bring your sleeping bag. Let me know if you'll be there so we can order enough pizza. Hope to see you then. Mary." So, you have a decision if you want to go to that slumber party or not. It's kind of like that when God calls a person, too. You do not have to accept the invitation. But, if you do decide to go, then you have to show up at the right time with the right stuff.

So, a calling from God is like that, except there are two different ways God calls people. And I want you to think about this with me. The first time I ever got to sit in a roomful of people who believed like me in church service, I was eighteen. And my parents had nothing to do with it. I was invited directly by God to be in the church through a man on the radio that I listened to. But many people, who are in the church today, have had a very different experience with their calling. They grew up in a family that was *in the church*, so they've never known a time they didn't understand about the Church of God. Those of you who came in that way, did you know that? Did you know that was your calling – that your parents and, sometimes, siblings were the paper on which God wrote His invitation to you?

Look at this scripture. This is Peter on the Day of Pentecost – the Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was, for the first time, given to people of the Church. Acts 2, verse 38 – Peter explained all this to the people and they said, “What should we do?”

Acts 2:38 – *And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”*

So, if your children are a part of this, then God is calling them. There it is. It's right there. Right out of the mouth of the apostle. If you're a child in a family, where one or both parents are committed to God, that is your calling. That's your invitation. That's how you learn about the party – eternal life. That's what the party is in the analogy. We get invited into eternal life with God, as God, in His Kingdom. So, God *wants* you. There's no doubt about it, else He wouldn't have called you. But it *is* your choice, if you're going to go or not. So, that means that you have a birthright. And are you going to keep it? Or, are you going to sell it?

Well, how would a person sell their calling today – their birthright? What would that look like? Well, one way to understand this is to look into the New Testament to see what challenges the members of the church underwent. What was there to tempt them to sell their birthright?

Let's look at a scripture in Jude :3 – Jude says:

Jude :3-4 – *Beloved* – talking to the whole church – *although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation* – that's what I *really* wanted to talk to you about – fun stuff – the party – eternal life – that promise – that birthright that we all have in common – *but I found it necessary to write, appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*

So, how do they do that? Well, they believe false things – false doctrines – things that aren't true

– in place of the truth. They sell the truth and go with the false beliefs.

You know, the early church was attacked mercilessly by heretical preachers. The apostles had *no* desire to promote unity of all faiths, like some do today, created by the free thought of human beings, instead of God's word. No, instead, they tenaciously clung to the truth of God as given by Jesus Christ and the prophets. That's our birthright! Many of them, unwilling to sell their birthright to save their lives, lost them. See, we're not a denomination. We're biblical Christians. We were called by God to this kind of faith. We cling to the original gospel. We do not think that the Bible needs to be updated because it's an old book. We believe that it was perfect the way Jesus inspired it, and that the way that they observed Christianity back then was perfect. It needs no updating and no changes. That's the kind of faith we were called to. We cling to the original gospel in the Bible.

Now, we don't do that because we're spiritual geniuses, or smarter than, or are better than people in other churches, but because God called us into this church. And we believe the gospel, as Jesus brought it, unadulterated by two thousand years of human reason. That's why we believe in observing the Sabbath and the holy days. That's why we don't believe in the trinity, or the doctrine of original sin, or that the Holy Spirit is the third member of the Godhead.

So, does that make us better than other Christians? No, it does not. And shame on those of us who, in our spiritual weakness, judge ourselves superior to others of differing beliefs. Some of them know things we don't know. A spiritually strong Christian knows all the differences are going to go away effortlessly once Christ returns and doesn't allow for differences to cause spirituality to be an area of superiority. Spirituality and human wisdom are an oxymoron.

I know a man who observed the Sabbath to learn more about the Bible. He paid a very large sum of money to attend an orthodox school of theology. They believe in the trinity, original sin and all the things I mentioned earlier. He told me, "I learned why they believe what they believe, and I learned a lot about the Bible that I didn't know. By that, I did *not* sell my birthright." He still observes all the practices and believes all the doctrines practiced and believed by the original church of Christ. But, if we stop observing and believing these biblical truth pillars, we're selling our birthright that God has given us – gave to us when He called us. If we begin to drop Sabbath observance, for example, we're moving toward selling our birthright for whatever it is we want to do on the Sabbath.

Now, I know some people think, "I can always repent later," but listen to what Paul tells us about Esau. It's in Hebrews 12:15:

Hebrews 12:15-17 – *See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.* Now, I don't think this means that Esau was necessarily committing sexual sin, but it does imply that he was unholy because he sold his birthright for some soup. He didn't value it enough. *For you know that*

afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

So, why was he not able to repent? Well, the apostle doesn't explain it, but it crossed my mind that it could be that he thought, "I'll repent later." It's pretty hard to be sincere when we *plan* to repentance along with the sin. Besides that, we know the Bible is filled with warnings about procrastinating spiritual change. Most of those people came to the terrible realization, "It's too late!" And that will happen to us, too, if we aren't sincere in our approach to God. So, "I'll prent later" doesn't work with Him.

So, to be called into a church that practices the original biblical truth is an incredible, fantastic blessing! If you're here today, that means that God *wants* you. But this is serious business. Once you make a commitment and are baptized, that means that you have covenanted with God to hang on to your birthright. It's God's precious gift to you. He won't take it from you, nor can anybody else – your parents, your siblings, your friends can't keep it for you. This is between you and God alone – just the two of you. Nobody else. And God's question to us is: What are you willing to do? Will you trade the Lamborghini for a Yugo? Well, it's your choice! What *are* you going to do? Whatever it is, don't sell your birthright!

This is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.