

THE BIRTHRIGHT AND THE BLESSING



Paul & Bunty Collins

In his letter to the Romans, as proof of God's sovereign choice in the way He has made salvation possible to mankind, Paul quotes a dramatic statement made by the Lord in Malachi 1:2,3:

“...Jacob I loved but Esau I hated” Romans 9:13.

Why would God “love” (literally “choose”) one and “hate” (literally “reject”) the other? This statement has been of tremendous importance down through the generations - both to God and to believers in Christ - and it is of vital importance to us today!

THE PROPHECY

“Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, ‘Why is this happening to me?’ So she went to inquire of the Lord. The Lord said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger’” Genesis 25:21-23 (read through to verse 28).

This prophetic declaration of the Lord concerning the twin boys was totally against the culture set in Israel. Esau, as the first born, automatically had the right to these special privileges expressed. Jacob was so named because he was born holding the heel of his brother.

[Jacob means “he grasps the heel”, a Hebrew idiom for “he takes advantage of” or “he deceives”].

Thus, in people's thinking, he was trying to take the place of his brother as the first born. As the boys grew to manhood we see that Jacob fulfilled his name (Genesis 27:1-9). With the help of his mother, Rebekah, he tricked and schemed to get what he wanted. He was the most unlikely

candidate out of all the great men of faith in the Old Testament for God to declare as one he loved. As for Esau, although not a perfect man, there are many others recorded in the Old Testament who were of far worse character than he was. What was it then that drew the love (choice) of God to one and the hatred (rejection) of God to the other? It was their *heart!* Genesis 25:29-34 begins to reveal a clear picture of this for us:

“Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, ‘Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!’ (That is why he was also called Edom) [Edom means “red”]. Jacob replied, ‘First sell me your birthright.’ ‘Look, I am about to die,’ Esau said. ‘What good is the birthright to me?’ But Jacob said, ‘Swear to me first.’ So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.’

THE HEART OF ESAU

The final phrase of Genesis 25:34 pinpoints the heart of Esau...

“So Esau despised his birthright”

In chapter 27 the account continues. Isaac, their father, is now very old and nearly blind. He thinks he’s about to die so he calls in Esau so he can impart to him the Blessing of the firstborn before he dies. He sends Esau off to hunt and prepare his favourite food before he does. Rebecca, obviously thinking she has to help the Lord out to see the prophesy He gave her fulfilled (always a dangerous error), connives with Jacob to deceive Isaac into thinking he is Esau and so Isaac lays hands on Jacob and pronounces the Blessing of the firstborn over him. Esau’s reaction when he comes back from the hunt and discovers Jacob has stolen his Blessing reveals the depth of his heart’s priority:

“When Esau heard his father’s words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, “Bless me—me too, my father!” v.34.

But it was too late. Isaac had already laid his hands on Jacob and imparted to him the firstborn Blessing (verses 30-40). Esau cries out bitterly...

“Isn’t he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times...This is the second time he has taken advantage of me: He took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing!” verses 34-36.

The priority of Esau’s heart

Jacob had not deceived Esau the first time. Esau had willingly sold his birthright for one meal, thus “despising” it. Hebrews 12:16 declares that Esau was “godless” (NIV) or “profane” (KJV) in selling his Birthright. This statement by Esau reveals a very important truth. The Birthright and the Blessing are not the same thing! They are two separate realities. Esau made a big mistake in his thinking. He thought that they came separately.

What was the Blessing?

Read Genesis 27::27-29. The Blessing was everything that meant a good life down here on earth. Isaac summarises it in verse 37:

“I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine.”

Esau wanted this above everything. He sold Jacob his Birthright but had no intention of giving him his Blessing which was his right as the firstborn.

**Esau loved the
world and the
things of the world**

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them” 1 John 2:15.

THE HEART OF JACOB

With all his faults (which later God dealt with and so changed his name! Genesis 32:22-32), Jacob had the one thing that caused God to say He loved him. It was the *priority of his heart!*

The priority of Jacob's heart

It is important to notice what Jacob asked Esau to sell him (Genesis 25:29-33). He did not ask for the Blessing but, in his heart, the first and foremost thing he desired was the Birthright! This then brings up the all-important question...

What was the Birthright?

This is not only important in understanding the hearts of these two men back then, but absolutely vital for us as believers in Christ today -- as the writer to the Hebrews exhorts us...

‘See that no one...is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son’ Hebrews 12:16.

The key that opens the understanding of this important truth that has echoed down through the centuries is found in the heart and lives of the “heroes of faith” described in Hebrews chapter 11. Read verses 8 through to 16. Note five expressions of their lives...

They “lived in tents”

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob...” vs.8-9.

“Living in tents” meant that life down here on earth was, to them, was transient. On earth they were free to move in any direction the Lord led them, according to His plan and purpose. Because of what they saw they did not put their “roots” down on earth and their focus in life was not the comfort this world could give.

➔ **Their focus was the promise God had given**

“...who were heirs with him of the same promise...For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” verse 9-10.

Every “hero of faith” listed in Hebrews 11 had taken hold of the promise given to Abraham. The vision of what they saw ahead was the glorious plan and purpose of God -- a City filled with redeemed people from every tribe, every nation and every language, all in the glory of His image (Revelation 5:9; 7:9). What they saw by faith totally affected the way they lived down on earth.

➔ **They experienced mighty miracles and impacted the world of their day**

“And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again” verses 32-35.

➔ **They willingly faced great persecution and hardship to see the vision fulfilled**

“There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawn in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goat-skins, destitute, persecuted and ill-treated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground” verses 35-38.



They lived by faith based on the hope set before them (Hebrews 11:1)

“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth...these were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect” vs. 13.

THE BIRTHRIGHT

These Old Testament heroes of faith are not the end of the story. They are dependent on us - believers of the Last Day - to see the fulfilment of what they believed of that glorious City of people, from every tribe and nation, filled with the glory of God.

The Giant Relay Race

Following all he has said in chapter 11, the writer to the Hebrews illustrates a picture in chapter 12, verses 1-2, to describe it all. He describes a giant relay race being run down through the centuries. The finishing line is God's eternal purpose.

“Since we have such a huge crowd of men of faith watching us from the grandstands, let us strip off anything that slows us down or holds us back, and especially those sins that wrap themselves so tightly around our feet and trip us up; and let us run with patience the particular race that God has set before us. Keep your eyes on Jesus...” (TLB).

The Baton

The baton being passed on is the right to fulfill in that particular generation the next stage which will bring about God's glorious purpose.

Abraham ran his race in his generation and fulfilled what was necessary. He got the *promised land*. He got the *promised son*. He got the *bride* for his son. From Isaac would come the *nation* who would dwell in the land, and from the nation would come the *Saviour*.

Jacob, with all his faults, had the one thing that drew the love of God to him. Jacob loved the Birthright. Isaac had held the baton of the Birthright out to Esau, but so little regard did he have for the eternal purpose of God, so focussed was he on a good life down on earth, he had given up his wonderful right to be involved with God in His eternal purpose. He had sold his eternal destiny for one measly meal. The enormity of what Esau had done, and his attitude of heart, caused God to say “Esau have I hated”.

Down through the centuries the heroes of faith took up the baton and fulfilled in their generation the *next stage* that was necessary.

Our Lord Jesus came, took up the baton, and fulfilled, by His *death and resurrection*, the all-important task that would bring about the New Creation people. Then, on the Day of Pentecost, He poured out the Holy Spirit on the believer and the baton was passed on to us, *His Church*, and with it His commission --

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” Mark 16:15.

This is Now Our Generation

The baton of the Birthright has now been held out to us. We are the Church of the “firstborn ones”.

“You have come...to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven” Hebrews 12:22.

The Blessing of the firstborn is ours too. In Christ, God has blessed us with “*every spiritual blessing in heavenly places*” (Ephesians 1:3) and He promises to meet all our needs (Philippians 4:18). He *HAS* and *DOES* bless us (2 Corinthians 1:20). We are greatly blessed in so many ways because we are greatly loved. But may we never have the spirit of Esau and just desire the Blessing without the Birthright. May our focus never be just on what we can get from God. The Lord wants us to fully enjoy all the benefits of our salvation, but He invites us to redirect our new lives in a total commitment to reach the world around us. We all, as New Creation people, have the glorious opportunity to be involved with the Lord in His magnificent, eternal purpose.

This is our Birthright!