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SELLING THE BIRTHRIGHT

– GENESIS 27:15-23,41-45. – MARCH 17. –

Golden Text: – "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but they that deal truly are his delight." – Prov. 12:22.

TO REBECCA were born two sons, twins, Esau being by a moment the elder. They were the heads or fathers of two nations nearly as dissimilar as themselves. The family of Jacob became known as Israel, God's peculiar people, inheritors through their father of the great Abrahamic promise. Esau's posterity were subsequently known as Edomites, and are well represented today in the Bedouin tribes of Arabia. At the birth of the twins the divine prophecy [R3954 : page 75] was that the elder should serve the younger, and the Apostle Paul called attention to this as an indication of God's foreknowledge of the difference in the characters of the two, and which he would choose to be the one through whom the Abrahamic promise would descend. – Rom. 9:12.

The narrative seems to show that these were very different types of men – the one, a jolly hunter, evidently lived what might be termed at that time a fast life, associating with the heathen peoples surrounding, and, as the heir-apparent of two-thirds of his father's estate under the Hebrew custom, he was doubtless well received everywhere. On the contrary, we are told that Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents – that is, he was a plain farmer, who gave his attention to caring for the estate. When the brothers were thirty-two years of age an incident occurred which had a most important bearing upon the interests of both for all future time. Esau had been away on a hunting expedition, and returned ravenously hungry at a time when Jacob had just prepared for himself a dinner of red lentils, of which both

brothers were very fond. Alexander White thus narrates the incident in graphic style, and we believe truthfully. He says: –

"Esau was a sportsman, boisterous, wild, clumsy, full of the manliest interests and purposes, and was a proverb of courage and endurance, a success in the chase....He had an eye like an eagle. His ear never slept, his arrow never missed the mark. A prince of men, a prime favorite with men, women and children – all the time more animal than man."

But his tastes and appetites, desires and pleasures, were surely of an earthly kind. He had little interest in his father's God and the great Abrahamic promise in which his father trusted. From this standpoint he had already sold his birthright – that is to say, it had already in his estimation lost all of its great value, it was not comparable with the sensuous pleasures in which he delighted. Jacob, on the contrary, inherited more of his father's disposition of steadfastness and earnestness, and had great respect to the Abrahamic covenant, deploring the fact that by the apparent accident of birth he had lost the birthright which his brother did not appreciate. Doubtless, too, he had heard through his mother of the prophecy that the elder should yet serve the younger, which implied that in some sense of the word it might be God's will that he should eventually become the heir of that promise.

GOD'S PROMISE APPRECIATED

How Jacob's heart dwelt upon the possibilities of so great an inheritance, the blessing of God, and that his posterity should be ultimately used of the Almighty in blessing all nations, peoples, kindreds and tongues! Doubtless for years he had sought opportunity to purchase from Esau the birthright which the latter evidently did not appreciate. And now, when his brother was hungry and desired the mess of pottage, was not this his opportunity for giving his brother what the latter preferred

and for getting from him what he did not appreciate, but which Jacob esteemed beyond all things of earthly value? On this Mr. White says: "Everybody knew that Esau's birthright was for sale: Isaac knew, Rebecca knew, and Jacob knew. Jacob had for a long time been watching his brother for a fit opportunity." This at last came when his brother returned hungry from the chase just at the time Jacob's dinner was ready. So when Esau said, "Jacob, I am ravenously hungry; figuratively speaking, I am famishing for some of those delicious red lentils of your cooking," Jacob's answer was in effect, "Yes, you may have them and I will go hungry, but on one condition: You are the elder, and therefore will have the right to inherit the birthright blessing. But what is that to you? What do you care for Grandfather Abraham's blessing? If now you want this pottage more than you want the blessing say so and it shall be yours. The blessing is a matter of faith, the pottage a matter of fact. I know you have little faith respecting the promise, and I know that you are quite hungry and quite fond of this pottage. I am fond of it also, but I will go without if you give me the birthright blessing in exchange."

Esau's retort was in effect, "Take it, Jacob; it may be good some day, though I confess I have not much confidence in it. It seems to me that these people round about that father Isaac calls heathen are good fellows, some of them fine neighbors, and I might say without prejudice to you, Jacob, that I think that your doting over that promise has had the [R3955 : page 75] effect of making you too sober, almost morose. Why do you not come out and have a good time with the rest of us? However, if you want my share in the Abrahamic promise for that soup you are welcome to it – give me the soup." "Wait a moment," said Jacob; "let us do this thing properly. Make an oath to the effect that this is a *bona fide* transaction for all time." "I will do it," says Esau; "here goes – now give me the soup." Thus was bartered the great oath-bound covenant of God and the wonderful blessings which it embraces, present and future. Neither man knew fully what he

was doing, for not until this Gospel age has the mystery of God in respect to that covenant been disclosed; and now, as the Apostle tells us, it is made known only to the saints, to those who receive the holy Spirit of adoption.

OBTAINING THE BLESSING

Twenty-five years rolled around after the above barter of the birthright. Esau, still a hunter, still fraternizing with the heathen peoples about, and married now to two Canaanitish women, was, despite his profligacy, his father's favorite. Jacob was still a God-fearing man, hoping for the realization eventually of his purchase, so highly prized. Isaac was old and had become blind, and considered that it was the right time to put the management of the estate in the hands of the elder son, Esau. Accordingly he made it known that he was about to bestow the patriarchal blessing, and under his instruction Esau had gone forth to prepare some savory venison as a feast for his father before the formal pronouncement of the blessing. Rebecca remembered the prophecy that the elder should serve the younger, and Jacob confided to her the fact that he had purchased the blessing of his brother and taken the latter's oath. They watched to see whether or not Esau would regard his oath and the sale of the blessing, but finding that he was disposed to disregard it and to violate all of his obligations, mother and son determined to use their every power to secure the fulfilment of Esau's engagement respecting the blessing. But considering that Isaac would not hear to this, they conspired together to deceive him.

As Esau's name indicated, he was a hairy man: so **[R3955 : page 76]** they arranged that Jacob should put on Esau's fine raiment, speak as much as possible in his tone of voice, and present kid's flesh to his father and receive the blessing while Esau was still absent hunting. Lest Isaac should mistrust the

deception, Jacob's neck and arms were covered with the fine hairy skin of a new-born kid. The deception was carried out, and Isaac – after saying, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau" – gave the blessing. Of course the unprincipled Esau, who, after selling the birthright and confirming the sale with an oath, was about to take it to himself, was angry that his brother should have outwitted him and obtained the blessing – not apparently that he cared so much for the Abrahamic promise and blessing thus entailed, but he feared that in some way his prominence in the family would be jeopardized and that he might perhaps lose the major part of the inheritance, the two-thirds, and get only Jacob's portion, namely one-third. Anger, malice, hatred, strife, envy, murder, were in his heart, and he said to himself, "It will not be very long until father dies; then will I slay my brother Jacob, and the entire inheritance will be mine."

JACOB A FUGITIVE BECAUSE OF HIS FAITH

Esau's murderous intentions reached the ears of Jacob's mother, who informed Jacob and advised that he go for a time at least and live with her father. Jacob, then over fifty-seven years of age, following this counsel, started out to carve his own fortune, leaving the entire estate in the hands of Esau, holding on only to the covenant promise. Here was another demonstration of his faith in God. He might have regretted his bargain, he might have renounced the blessing in Esau's favor. But, no; he would hold to this, cost him what it might – possessions, a home, family association. He would go out in the fear of the Lord; he would attest his devotion to God and his faith in his promise. Is it with any wonder that we read that in his journey the Lord appeared to him at Bethel and assured him that he would be his exceeding great reward? Jacob's faith and zeal were of the kind which God approves, the kind which he has blessed from Abraham's day until the present time.

JACOB'S DECEPTION OF ISAAC

Do we excuse Jacob and his mother, and approve of their telling lies to Isaac both by word and act? No, we cannot approve of this course, and yet it seems evident to us that we must not judge Jacob's actions according to the standards which we would apply to ourselves. We, as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, begotten of the holy Spirit, have and ought to have still clearer views of the Lord's will in such matters, still greater faith than Jacob exercised. But what more could we expect of a natural man than we find in Jacob's conduct? We must gauge our conceptions of right and wrong by the divine standard, and while we cannot suppose that God approved of the course adopted by Jacob and Rebecca, we must check ourselves and others from too rabid denunciation of Jacob's proceeding by noting the fact that, according to the record, at no time did God charge up this matter against Jacob or reprove or punish him for it. On the contrary, we find the Lord appearing to him and manifesting his favor in visions and revelations and assurances of divine protection and care, without mention of the deception by which the ends were gained. Where God keeps silence, is it wise for us to say very much in the way of reproof?

What better course could Jacob have taken? We answer that if he had possessed still greater faith he might have waited for the Lord and permitted divine providence to bring to him a blessing which he craved, which God had foretold should be his, and which he had purchased at more than its value according to the estimation of Esau, though at far less than its value according to Jacob's estimation. Some point us to the difficulties and trials and perplexities which came to Jacob as a result of fleeing from his father, declaring that these were God's punishments upon him. But we reply that Jacob did not so regard these; that the Scriptures remind us that whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and he particularly told Jacob of his love for him. So it is with

the best and truest of the Lord's people today. The fact that they have trials and difficulties and disappointments and persecutions, so that sometimes they must flee for their lives, by no means proves that the Lord's favor is not with them; rather these things, as the Apostle assures us, are working out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Similarly, Jacob's trials and difficulties and sorrowful experiences worked out for him a blessing of heart and character.

Here our Golden Text applies – "Lying lips are an abomination unto the Lord, but they that deal truly are his delight." Jacob was not one of those who made clean the outside of the cup while within it was impure. He was at heart of the character mentioned in the Golden Text, "They that deal truly." Neither can we say that he was graspingly selfish with his brother, for we find in his general character a breadth of liberality rarely met with. We recall that he never asked even for the younger son's one-third interest in the estate, but that returning later he instead proffered Esau a present of cattle, sheep, etc. If we must charge Jacob with the lying lips we can at least credit him with the honesty of heart. He lied in order to secure justice and because his faith was not sufficiently strong to permit him to trust the Lord implicitly respecting a matter which he so highly esteemed and was willing indeed to give everything but life to possess.

A lesson for the spiritual Israelite is that we not only should esteem as Jacob did the value of the divine promise and favor and blessing, but that to a similar zeal we should add still more faith, so that we could trust the Lord to give us the blessings he has promised. This was the example which Abraham set, but which Jacob evidently had not fully appreciated. Abraham was called upon to sacrifice his son Isaac, the heir of the promise, through whom the Lord had declared the promise should be fulfilled. Abraham's faith was sufficient, and in due time God

settled the matter in that Isaac was received from the dead in a figure. (Heb. 11:19.) We cannot doubt that if Jacob had possessed a similar degree of faith God in some manner would have given him the blessing, despite his father's intentions to the contrary and Esau's dishonesty and violation of his oath.

THE APOSTLE'S APPLICATION OF THIS

The Apostle refers to the main incident of this lesson, the sale of the birthright, and in very round terms denounces **[R3956 : page 77]** the spirit of Esau – the spirit that is not appreciative of God's mercy and blessing which he has in reservation for them that love him. He speaks of Esau as that "profane person who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright." (Heb. 12:16.) He was profane in the sense that all the Gentiles or heathen were recognized as profane – godless, not reverent, unbelieving, preferring the things of this present time, the good and the bad, to the better portion of the future, which they have not the faith to realize nor the appreciation to enjoy. The fact that Esau was evidently birth-marked and by heredity a wild man, loving the more animal and natural things, so far from being to his condemnation is rather in his favor. If his failure to appreciate the spiritual things was the result of an inherited depravity of taste, then we can say that the redemption provided in Jesus' sacrifice covers that entire blemish and guarantees eventually to Esau an opening of the eyes of his understanding and an enlightenment of his mind to appreciate the better things – when in due time, during the Millennial age, the Redeemer shall be the Restorer. (Acts 3:19-21.) For Jacob to have taken the course of Esau would have been a much more heinous matter, because by nature he had a loftier mind, a more reasonable soul, less impaired by the fall.

So, too, when we apply this principle today we find that there are many natural men of the Esau type who have no interest

in or appreciation of spiritual things: we sympathize with them rather than blame them, and look forward with pleasure to the time when the Lord's mercy shall be extended toward them in measure proportionate to the degree of their share in the fall – to assist them by the judgment of the Millennial age (its rewards and punishments) to see the right way and to learn righteousness therein, and eventually (if they will) to attain perfection and eternal life. On the other hand, if by the grace of God we have been favored in being better born, born the children of believers – especially if by the grace of God our eyes have been opened to an appreciation of the heavenly spiritual promises – how great is this blessing! What advantage we have every way over the others of the Esau type. What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness! Surely the Lord may expect much more of us, and we should expect much more of ourselves than of our Esau neighbors.

SELLING THE SPIRITUAL BIRTHRIGHT

Examining the Apostle's argument still more closely we find that he especially addresses the Church, not the world, in this exhortation that we appreciate God's grace and do not sell our birthright. The world has no birthright to sell at the present time: as children of Adam they were all themselves "sold under sin." The Lord addresses those who have by the Lord's grace escaped from this slavery, being justified by faith in the precious blood of Christ. We were in bondage, but are now made free – and "whom the Son makes free is free indeed." (John 8:36.) After being made free we received, as a further grace of God, an invitation to be heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant – the very one for which Jacob was willing to sacrifice everything. We come into this relationship, as the Apostle points out, by our acceptance of our Lord Jesus and our full consecration unto death with him. The point of the Apostle's argument is that all of the consecrated ones are in the position of these two sons of

Isaac: the inheritance of that Abrahamic Covenant lies between us somewhere – some will get it and some will not.

The Apostle wishes us to see the character of this class that will inherit the promise – they must not be, like Esau, careless, worldly minded, thoughtless of God and unbelieving respecting the future provision. If they are thus disposed they will be sure to find opportunities for bartering their inheritance – it would surely slip from them to others who have a higher appreciation of its value, as the inheritance of this covenant slipped from Esau and was secured by Jacob.

"FOR ONE MORSEL OF MEAT"

True, Esau had a whole mess of pottage, yet the Apostle in speaking of it minimizes it, saying, "One morsel." He felt that what Esau got was of such trifling value that he could hardly express it in terms; it seemed as nothing, as merely a bite, though to Esau himself, doubtless, the pottage made a very good dinner for the time. So it is with us: from one standpoint we could sell our birthright for considerable, from the other standpoint we get practically nothing for it.

Let us notice various ways of selling the birthright, remembering that only those who have come into covenant relationship to God through Christ have the birthright at all, so they could dispose of it.

The Esaus amongst the Lord's people are those who love the world and the things of the world, who set great store by the pleasures of the present time. The enjoyment of these means the approval of the world, fine houses, fine clothing, plenty to eat. If in the Lord's providence such blessings come to us they would necessarily be trials, testings of our faith, because the world at the present time is in an undone condition through the fall and through the machinations of the Adversary. The testing time

comes when we see duty and faithfulness to the Lord to be on one side of the question and either the rejection of these blessings or the securing of them on the other side. We cannot serve both God and Mammon, and we must then choose. Happy is he that chooses as Jacob did, to lose all earthly advantages that he may gain the heavenly promise. Unhappy it will be for him who loves the present world, its joys, its pleasures, its emoluments and wealth, so that he is willing to dispose of his birthright that he may have these. True, the seller does not always realize what he is parting with, nor perhaps intends to part with it at all, even as in the case of Esau, but the testing comes nevertheless, and each one must be prepared therefor.

Perhaps no class of the Lord's people have more temptation along the line of selling their birthright privileges than have the preachers. As the truth comes to them it brings responsibilities, and they realize these, and if then they allow love of ease or name or fame or wealth or standing to lead them to unfaithfulness the effect will be the loss of the inheritance. We do not say that they will be eternally tormented, God forbid! We do say with the Scriptures that the inheritance of this Abrahamic Covenant can only go to those who appreciate it and are willing to let it cost them everything to gain it. This is God's arrangement that he might test, might prove, every son whom he receiveth under **[R3956 : page 78]** this Abrahamic Covenant, every member of the body of Christ.

A little while and the clouds will pass, and we shall see clearly the riches of God's inheritance in the saints and the exceeding greatness of their reward; a little while, and how miserable appears the choice of those who, like Esau, have sold their birthright for business advantages, emoluments, honors of men, etc. O, how in the light of that glorious day all these things that are so highly esteemed amongst men will be counted as less than one morsel of meat – one moment of trifling earthly

pleasure or satisfaction! Now is the time for all to choose of which class we will be; now is the time to lay aside every weight and every besetting sin and to fully count the cost, to lay everything on the Lord's altar, sacrificing all of the earthly interests that we may be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together. – Rom. 8:17.
