

## **JUST A LENTIL MISTAKE** **Genesis 25:19-34**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Steve Goodier, a motivational speaker and an ordained minister, has observed that both the hummingbird and the vulture fly over our nation's deserts. All vultures see is rotting meat, because that is what they look for. They thrive on that diet. But hummingbirds ignore the smelly flesh of dead animals. Instead, they look for the colorful blossoms of desert plants.

- The vultures live on what was. They live on the past. They fill themselves with what is dead and gone.
- But hummingbirds live on what is. They seek new life. They fill themselves with freshness and life.

Each bird finds what it is looking for.

We all do.

I've particularly noticed this in the political realm. People who want to see a certain candidate or politician bumble, fumble and stumble will notice mistakes in almost everything that person does or says. But by the same token, those who already think highly of that individual will see mostly praiseworthy acts and will hear mostly commendable comments in what is said or done.

I've watched it in the church. We just can't please someone who has already decided to leave the church. That person, who may have thought a certain church was just terrific a few months ago, suddenly can't be pleased. The temperature is too warm or too cool. The worship is too traditional or too contemporary. The preacher dresses too formally or too casually. He preaches too long or he preaches too long. Once people want to find fault, that's what they will find.

I've especially seen this phenomenon in marriages.

- His rhythmic snoring used to be comforting but now it is annoying.
- Her unique laugh was endearing but now it is irritating.
- His passion for his hobbies was part of his charm but now it is part of his aggravation.
- Her fastidious tidiness was refreshing but now it is just irksome.

The real problem is usually something very different from the issues that are on the table. Typically, someone wants out and when that's what they want, they can see a host of reasons why.

We usually see what we are looking for. And what we are looking for will shape the course of our lives.

It did for a man named Esau. We can read about him in Genesis chapter 25 through chapter 36. We won't read all of that this morning. I won't make reference to all of it today. I want to focus in on one incident toward the beginning of the life of Esau. It is an incident recorded in Genesis 25:19-34.

<sup>19</sup> *This is the account of Abraham's son Isaac. Abraham became the father of Isaac, <sup>20</sup> and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean.*

<sup>21</sup> *Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. <sup>22</sup> The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.*

<sup>23</sup> *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."*

<sup>24</sup> *When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. <sup>25</sup> The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. <sup>26</sup> After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.*

<sup>27</sup> *The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. <sup>28</sup> Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.*

<sup>29</sup> *Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. <sup>30</sup> He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.)*

<sup>31</sup> *Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."*

<sup>32</sup> *"Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?"*

<sup>33</sup> *But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.*

<sup>34</sup> *Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.*

*So Esau despised his birthright.*

To say that Esau despised his birthright is to say he had disdain for his birthright. He devalued his birthright. He disregarded his birthright. The Bible can make that observation because, quite simply, Esau thought his birthright was worth less than a bowl of lentil stew. Esau thought that way because he saw what he was looking for. He was looking for:

#### I. **The Negligible Rather Than The Valuable**

The culture of Esau's day was strongly patriarchal. The firstborn son was "IT". He was the favored son by virtue of his birth order. Nowhere was this more graphically demonstrated than in the distribution of the estate upon the death of a father. His firstborn son got twice as much of his assets as each of his other sons. If a man had five sons, his estate was divided into six equal parts and each son got  $\frac{1}{6}$  of the assets except for the firstborn who got  $\frac{2}{6}$  of the inheritance. (I was never very good at math but I remember that  $\frac{2}{6}$  is the same as  $\frac{1}{3}$ . So 4 of the sons got  $\frac{1}{6}$  of the inheritance but the firstborn got  $\frac{1}{3}$ . Twice as much.)

Now Esau's grandpa, Abraham, was a VERY rich man. Very! And Esau's daddy, Isaac, took his inheritance and used it wisely so that when Isaac was very old, he was even wealthier than Abraham had been.

Isaac had two sons: Esau and Jacob. Esau, as the older of the two, stood to inherit  $\frac{2}{3}$  of a large fortune. He knew that. He'd always known that. He grew up as a rich kid assuming he would become a rich man.

But on the day that is recounted in our text, Esau wasn't thinking much about his birthright. He was thinking about his belly. He was hungry. He was famished. He was ravenous and all he could think about was the gnawing in his gut.

We tend to see what we look for and what Esau was looking for was a way to satisfy his appetite. When he got in from hunting, his kid-brother, Jacob, was cooking some lentil soup. It smelled great. It looked appetizing. It seemed as if it would satisfy his craving. So he asked for some soup.

Jacob just lifted the lid, stirred the pot and let Esau savor the anticipation of a hearty bowl of soup. No Campbell's Soup commercial ever made a stomach growl like Jacob made Esau's tummy rumble.

Having baited the trap, Jacob tripped the trigger and said, "I won't give you any of my soup. But I'll trade you for it. You give me your birthright and I'll give you some soup. And I'll throw in some bread, too."

Esau, who saw the negligible rather than the valuable, figured, "What good is  $\frac{2}{3}$  of Dad's estate if I've already starved to death?  $\frac{1}{3}$  of a fortune is still a lot of money. I'll take the soup."

Never, in the history of man, has a poorer bargain been struck.

- The Canarsie Indians who sold Manhattan to Peter Minuit for \$24 got gyped. But the Canarsie Indians didn't make nearly as bad a deal as Esau did.
- In 1964, when the Cubs traded Lou Brock to the Cardinals and got Ernie Broglio, that was a bad deal for the Cubs. But, hey, it's the Cubs. What do you expect? And even at that, it is not the worst trade in history.

No, the worst deal in history was when Esau traded his birthright for a bowl of soup. And that was because he was looking for the negligible rather than the valuable.

## II. **The Immediate Rather Than The Ultimate**

Esau made such a rotten deal because he was looking for the immediate rather than the ultimate.

In the short term, he was hungry for food. But in the long term, he would have a craving for his father's estate: not just the monetary value but the sentiment that goes with the land his daddy farmed, the herds he built up, the wells he dug... People who've grown up on a farm know what I mean. It is more than the cash value; the family farm is in the DNA of the farm family.

Esau bartered away most of the family farm for one bowl of lentil soup. Because he wanted to satisfy his immediate hunger even at the expense of his supreme desires and his ultimate goals, he traded away that which was most important to him.

One of the marks of maturity is when a person is willing to wait for delayed gratification. He'll pass on the snacks by the checkout counter so he will have room to eat a delicious meal later. Maybe he will decide to forego the unskilled job today so he can take the training required for the career of his dreams. A couple waits until after marriage because they know it is the right thing to do and because they know they will complicate their lives if they don't wait.

The May issue of the New Yorker magazine has an article by Jonah Lehrer that reports the results of a study conducted by Stanford University in the late 1960's. Children were put in a room that was little more than a closet. In the room was a desk and chair. On the desk was a tray with various treats. A child was allowed to select his favorite treat. The researcher then told the child that if he waited until the researcher

returned to the room, he could have two pieces of the treat but if he decided to eat it sooner, he only received the one. The average wait among pre-schoolers was less than three minutes before they ate the treat and settled for one.

The interesting thing about this research was what was found as these subjects were followed throughout their lives. They noticed that the children who took one treat quickly instead of waiting for a greater reward, seemed more likely to have behavioral problems, both in school and at home. They got lower S.A.T. scores. They struggled in stressful situations, often had trouble paying attention, and found it difficult to maintain friendships. The child who could wait fifteen minutes had an S.A.T. score that was, on average, two hundred and ten points higher than that of the kid who could wait only thirty seconds.

The willingness to wait for the ultimate blessings rather than settle for immediate pleasure, is a mark of maturity and a hallmark of success. But Esau did not have that ability. He was willing to settle for less rather than wait for the best.

### **III. The Temporal Rather Than The Eternal**

Over the years, I've enjoyed some very fine meals. At one time, it was my job to go to lots of restaurants and eat expensive meals. Some were memorable. Most were enjoyable. But all were temporary. Within a few hours, the food had been digested and I was hungry again. Food never satisfies for very long.

Nothing physical does. Nothing physical will. Ever.

- Not that new appliance. Not that nice car. Not that next promotion.
  - Not that new blouse. Not that nice house. Not that next spouse.
- Nothing physical can bring lasting satisfaction. Nothing physical will. Nothing physical can.

Esau traded his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup and within a short time, he was hungry again.

But there is something that brings lasting satisfaction. In John 4, Jesus was talking to a woman from Samaria. They sat at a well curb and visited. Jesus offered the woman water which, if she drank of it, she would never thirst again. The woman, no doubt thinking of the convenience of never again having to draw water from a deep well, asked for some of that special water. Jesus explained that anyone who believes in him and puts faith in him will be satisfied forever.

Esau did not grasp that the physical will never bring lasting satisfaction. And he never knew about the eternal refreshment that does. So he focused his attention on the physical rather than the eternal.

He wasn't the first and he isn't the last. Many a life has been bartered for the brief pleasure of a moment's delight. Life was meant to be enjoyed for eternity...in the presence of the Father in heaven.

**CONCLUSION:**

Ultimately, Esau was looking out for his own wishes rather than his father's. Jacob had planned for Esau to inherit  $\frac{2}{3}$  of his wealth. Jacob had also planned for Esau to receive the benefit of his blessing. But Esau had little respect for his father's wishes and merely considered his own. The negative consequences of that one bowl of soup impact our world to this day.

And if we merely consider our own wishes and have little regard for our Father's, the negative consequences will last through eternity. As Hebrews 12:15-17 says of Esau,

*<sup>17</sup> Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.*

Are you ready to surrender your temporary and fleeting life so you can receive eternal life? If so, come to Jesus...now.

**INVITATION:** #481 – “Come Just As You Are”