



The Sermon

Dr. Austin Duncan

Genesis 25:27-34

"Jacob and Esau"

May 1, 2022

TRANSCRIPT

So, I invite you to open your Bible to Genesis 25, Genesis 25. And it is a most appropriate passage for me as an aspiring hunter, to look at the origins of Jacob and Esau in their infamous conflict. And like so many passages, I don't think it's very well-understood; and my desire this morning is that you would grow in your understanding of this famous moment, this birthright despised, and you would see not only its significance in salvation history, but you would truly see its import, its significance to you and to the way that you think about God and His grace in your life and in your period of history. So let's begin by diving in and then I'll pray. It's Genesis 25, my assignment is verse 27 through the end of the chapter, verse 34.

Genesis 25:27, " When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents. Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; and Esau said to Jacob, 'Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished.' Therefore his name was called Edom. But Jacob said, 'First sell me your birthright.' Esau said, 'Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?' And Jacob said, 'First swear to me'; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. And then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright." This is the very Word of the living God, let's ask for God's blessing on it.

[Prayer] Father, thank You for Your inherent, inspired, Holy Word. Thank You for the power that is within it, to open blind eyes unto salvation, to

convict of sin, and to promote righteousness in Your people. I pray that Your church would be edified today because of our attention on Your Word. Help us by Your Spirit to behold wonderful things from it, in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

Twin boys are an extraordinary thing, aren't they? To think about two boys, womb-mates from the start, wrestling around together in their mama's tummy; to think about the twins of the generation of promise; but to know, as you learned last week, how this at the very outset was already determined by God, how these two boys would not be best friends, but far from it. They would be not only in perpetual conflict with one another, but their lineage, their households and their generations that follow would be one of the most well-known conflicts in all of biblical, and even human history. And as we look at this very human story of the first episode in their adult lives, I think it's important to set the stage. We'll go back to what Dr. Lawson covered last time to help us understand what's going on here. I mean, this passage has got so much happening in it, so much proleptically, so much in an attempt to set the stage, an attempt to open the curtain on the first scene of these young men's interaction. And everything that you hear in the next ten chapters or so about Isaac their father and Jacob and Esau will be determined and set up by this crucial moment in biblical history.

To understand this exchange of a birthright for a bowl of stew is so significant in thinking about not just an inheritance, not just a moment in these two men's lives, but there's some spiritual truth behind this, that if God gives us the grace, we'll explore this truth; and I hope He'll open your eyes to see what truly sets these two men apart and what makes them the same. The story of Jacob and Esau, the most famous twin trouble in the history of the world, is one that shows us something not just about these two men or even their generations that follow, but shows us something about God's grace and how He operates in human history. The story of Jacob and Esau, and in particular this exchange that gives us a glimpse into the character of both of these men helps us understand how God operates in bringing about His plan and His purposes.

So I'd like to cover this in in two parts today, just following the basic outline of this exchange. We'll look at, first, verse 27 and 28 and look at "a striking contrast," and then verse 29 through verse 34 we can call it "a shameful exchange." But I want to somehow sneak five points into this, so I'm going to put three at the end to help us understand how we should respond to this.

But let's just look at that outline to start with: "A striking contrast," verses 27 to 28; and then, "The shameful exchange," verses 29 to 34. And I hope to bring out some detail in this text that I think will enrich our understanding of it, and especially of the grace of God, because the emphasis of this text, it's easy to get distracted by the stew and the lentils and the hunting, and the quiet man, that is, Jacob. But the emphasis of this text really hits on that final line, and it seems to be the concern of the rest of the biblical writers, from Malachi, to the Lord Jesus in His ministry, to the author of Hebrews, to Paul in Romans 9, that the emphasis that you cannot miss in this story is not just a tale of a wily exchange birthright for stew.

It's not just a conflict between two brothers. But there's something going on here on a spiritual level that as Moses pens this account, he wants us to all understand. And I think in God's kind providence, that emphasis is at the very end of this passage with those words: "Thus Esau despised his birthright." And to come to an understanding of what that phrase is all about, which is, I think, the emphasis of this passage and the setup for all the Isaac and Esau and Jacob stories that follow for the chapters that unfold after this, that serves as a hinge point between the great faith and testimony and legacy of the grandfather Abraham, and moves towards the culmination of the book of Genesis in the Joseph stories. This is so key to understand what it means to despise the birthright. You see, from there you'll come to understand something that is most appropriate that we think about it as we take the Lord's Supper at the end of this.

So how's it all going to come together? I don't know. But we've got a lot to do here. We've got two brothers in this perpetual conflict pitted against each other from the womb. We have this very ancient exchange that has so many elements of unfamiliarity to us in the gap between our culture and their culture. We have the emphasis, I think, clearly put before us that Esau despised his birthright. And then we're going to take the Lord's Supper together as a church family, and we're going to think through all that Christ is and has done for us. And I really think in God's providence this is a good passage to do that. Wouldn't have chosen it if it wasn't assigned to me; but I'm grateful to see how the Lord's Table and this bowl of stew can come together to help us understand the importance of prioritizing spiritual realities over physical ones.

So let's look at these twin troubles, beginning with, "The striking contrast," in verse 27, the striking contrast.

Sorry, is this ringing a lot to y'all? No? OK, it's just me and my bee in my brain. A lot of shotgun, you know, noises this weekend, so could be a flaw there.

Verse 27, "When the boys grew up, when the boys grew up," this is the jump from verse 26 to 27 that was so well taught to us last week. We're reminded of the significance of the changing of an epoch here. As you've been told before, the book of Genesis is arranged not in even sections, but in generational chunks, with this Hebrew word *toledot*. It's the generations of: "These are the generations of." And that word serves as a heading to each of the major divisions of the book of Genesis, starting in Genesis 2:4; and then in Genesis 6:9, "In the days of Noah"; and then in Genesis 10 and Genesis 11, surrounding the Tower of Babel accounts.

And then here in verse 12 of chapter 25 it tells us again, "These are the records of the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son," and these dividing markers, occurring again in verse 19, "Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac," drive along the book of Genesis, the book of beginnings, the beginning of the human race, the beginning of God's work in redeeming His creation, all of them marked by the changing over of generation after generation. And this contrast begins with these young boys, now adults, probably in their early adulthood, through their tumultuous growing up years the wrestling would have never stopped that began in the womb. And as Rebekah had prayed for an answer to why she was having so much trouble in her pregnancy, the Lord graciously answered her inquiry in verse 23 of chapter 25 telling her, "Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples will be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger."

And even in the moment of their birth, this was demonstrated. God had given Rebekah this ultrasound of unbelief, a sonogram of salvation, an origin story of the grace of God and how He would continue to operate after His servant Abraham had passed off the scene. And so as she felt this pull within her womb, even in their birth, as Esau the firstborn comes forth, looking like he's wearing a red Raiders jacket, you know, he's just this red-covered, hairy baby, born first. But in this most unusual moment, his younger brother Jacob is hanging on to his ankle, grabbing onto his foot, grasping his heel, coming out right after him. They're already locked in this massive struggle. And it's here we're set on our journey with these two brothers, both names accordingly: Esau, going to be associated for the rest

of his life, this rugged, head-strong, kind of ready reddish guy called Edom, or Esau, this word that just meant "red."

And red was the right color for this guy. He was aggressive, he was outdoors, he was practically wearing a fur coat all the time. I mean, this guy exudes testosterone. He can't hold still, he's always in the wild, he can't be pinned down. He's going to be a moving man throughout his life, he's going to run and run and run. That's Esau.

And then we meet this little baby Jacob in that prior section, and he's going to be the grasper, isn't he. He's going to be the grabber. He's going to be the one who is known for his cunningness, known for his grabbiness, known to be the one who's always trying to get the advantage. Jacob will be transformed at the end of his life, he'll become Israel, both a name change and the father of that nation in every respect. And before God changes Jacob, we get to know him. And even in his infancy he has this way about him – never content with second place, always pushing. He's got the Jordan gene. He has this thing in him that drives him, that demands the first place; and that's a tough place to be in as the second born.

And so the timeless tale is set up with this ultrasound that shows these two, this word from God promising that He will reverse the conventions of the age, that the older will serve the younger, that one will be stronger, that both will be separated and they will become two nations in perpetual conflict. That's the setup, that and the closing of the curtain on the life and faith of Abraham. I mean, that's what's so remarkable here. I mean, this story has been dominated, this book has been dominated by the faith of Abraham; and to have Abraham pass off the scene and to leave things in the hands of Isaac and Jacob and Esau should make every reader tremble.

I mean, Abraham wasn't a perfect man, but Abraham was a faithful man. Abraham was a man whose implicit trust in the God that called him out of Ur, his implicit trust in Yahweh was something that we saw in every episode of Abraham's life. And as we read those words of now Abraham is off the scene, we look at who's in the driver's seat on a human perspective and we think, "Well Isaac, he's good at romance I guess, that's kind of his attribute." And then you look at the future and you think, "OK, these two guys are going to run this outfit? This is a nightmare. What is God doing?"

But God's plan is not aborted, there's not even a bump in the road, and this striking contrast needs to be set up for us to show that this infancy was fulfilled, that this prophecy would find its reality as it worked out in life in a way that no one could have anticipated. And so verse 27 starts that striking contrast by saying, "When the boys grew up." You see, and as they grew they obviously were not identical twins, they looked very different and they acted very different; and we have a depiction of them that captures them so well.

First off, look at Esau, verse 27: "Esau became a skillful hunter, a skillful hunter." To understand Esau is to understand he is a man of the field, a man who loves the great outdoors, a man who couldn't be fenced in, a western man - that's what we'd call him; back then it was an eastern man. How things change. But Esau is this outdoorsman. He's the original hunter, he's the original Duck Dynasty, he's the original outdoorsman in *Field & Stream* magazine, he's that guy. And as you read this account of Esau being a man's man and an outdoorsman and a skillful hunter, that he's able to stalk his prey, that he's able to bring in the bacon, you just think, "Boy, I want to hang out with Esau." At least that's how I think. What a weekend with Esau in the mountains, in the woods.

He's called in verse 27, "a man of the field." I mean, this guy could not be contained, and that reflects on his inner nature as well. Esau will be aggressive. Esau will be dangerous. Esau will be perceived by Jacob to be an extraordinary threat to everything that Jacob is going to pursue and grab and chase. This is a heated rivalry in the making, and Esau is a man whose great strength, knowledge of the outdoors, will be a great point of intimidation for his younger brother. You'll remember the scene to come when they finally are reunited in a few chapters from now as they come together, Jacob has this understanding that Esau has every advantage physically, because he's always been that guy.

The contrast continues by showing us a little portrait of Jacob, and it's here I think we need some help from the original languages, because we have a tendency maybe to read into this a little bit too much, because it says, "Jacob was a peaceful," - or maybe your Bible says - "a quiet man, living in tents." Now the word "peaceful" there, or "quiet," speaks of steadiness, of resolve. It doesn't mean that Jacob was bookish. It doesn't mean that Jacob, as you'll see him here cooking stew in a moment - he was certainly his mother's favorite, but I don't think it's fair to completely categorize him as a mama's boy. Jacob wasn't effeminate. It's not like he's the Martha Stewart and his brother's the hunter guy. Jacob, he was a man of flocks. In

fact, you see later in Genesis his extraordinary skill in tending to the pasture.

Jacob's concerns were domestic, not in the sense of scrubbing the kitchen, in the sense of managing the work that God had entrusted to his family. All these people are nomads, all these people live in tents, they move around the wilderness; they were all experts in surviving in hostile conditions. But Jacob's concerns were more calculated. He was concerned about the economics of things. He was a steady thinker. His thoughts ran deep about the condition of the herds and flocks. Jacob was a cunning, quiet, staying among the tents. He knew exactly what was happening all around him. And he had a plan; he was scheming, planning, thinking. Jacob would have been great at chess, seven or eight moves ahead all the time.

Now that's not to say that Jacob wasn't trouble in his own. I mean, you can call him a usurper, and you'd be right; you can call him a heel-grabber, and you'd be right. But I think the best way to translate his name: Jacob was a rascal, he was a rascal. And as you read this story – and you already are told by God who the choice one is, that Jacob is God's choice, and Esau has been rejected by God – at the very outset there'll be times in this narrative where you'll go, "I don't know that God made the right choice, because Jacob lives up to this rascal nature."

And then in verse 28 we see more about this contrast, because we see a dangerous recipe for trouble in this family. We see that covenant romance between Isaac and Rebekah, even Rebekah's prayer life on display in the prior paragraph as she seeks the Lord, inquires of the Lord. Now we see the first signs of significant conflict between this couple. These boys are not just divided against each other, they're going to divide their parents as well. Verse 28, "Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob." And this is the beginnings of these rivalries you find in Old Testament families, particularly in the book of Genesis, that will play out over and over again, and serve as a warning for families for generations to come throughout history of how dangerous it is to play favorites.

I have four kids, they're all my favorites. There are times I like one more than the others; and who that one is changes week to week. But we could all understand that we have kids that are more like us and kids that are more like our spouse. They take on some of our nature, some of our habits, some

of our proclivities; and there's nothing wrong with that, that's part of the way that God wires people, isn't it.

And there's nothing in this text that tells us that Isaac didn't love Jacob and Esau, or that Rebekah didn't love one. But the favoritism is on significant display, and that's going to come into play in these stories that follow as well. And that dangerous preferential treatment, that favoritism that doesn't seem to be linked to anything on a moral or spiritual level, but it just seems to be a prejudice, a preference, because of maybe time spent in the fields that Isaac had with Esau, because of the domestication of Jacob around his mother Rebekah. Whatever it was, it would become a problem, because it would bring division in this family, division between this husband and this wife.

Their kids came between them, and the rivalry is heated up; and that's the striking contrast. You have the red, tough, field-oriented, mountain-climbing, hunting and fishing Esau, whose dad is very close to him, and you have Jacob, this calculating, cunning, careful, thoughtful, quiet man, who's going to be a manager of all of the economy of his household, and he'll be in tight with his mom because of that; and you have a recipe for disaster. And that striking contrast leads to, "A shameful exchange," starting in verse 29 through the end.

Verse 29, "When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished." Now I know we're prone to picture this as a Martha Stewart scene, you know, he's got cumin and everything else out; and I don't think that's what's happening here. I think Jacob is probably in the tents, because that's all they had was tents. They didn't have running water and a sink and a Chip and Jojo kitchen - don't picture it like that. They're out there in the fields where they live. Jacob's tending the flock. Esau's out looking for game, and he comes back from this excursion and he's starving to death, either in a hyperbolic way, you know, he's so hungry he could die, is the words; or he's actually so hungry that he could die. Either way, the desperation is on display. And Jacob is here doing his responsibilities; he's made up some stew.

And this isn't just an ordinary stew here; there's something deceptive in nearly everything Jacob does. Jacob's stew is intentionally looking like the kind of stew Esau would like, the kind of stew that's got some significant animal parts in it. The word for "red" is not only very similar to Esau's



name, it's the idea behind it is to conjure up this idea of blood, that this is a hardy stew, this is a stew that's got some protein in it. But tragically – and I don't know if this has ever happened to you – it's a vegan stew, much to Esau's dismay. But he doesn't know that, he just smells the aroma of this thing, and he's starving and he just needs to eat. And Jacob has set this stew up like a trap. It's one of the reasons that later in Genesis, Esau will accuse Jacob of tricking him, that this whole thing was a setup. And Esau's probably right, because that's how Jacob was. He was always two steps ahead, he was always conniving, he was the rascal up to no good.

"And Esau says to Jacob, 'Let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I'm famished.'" Even in his speech he's so animalistic, so oriented towards his appetite, towards the natural. He just wants that food: "Give me that food." And Jacob has, it turns out, been quite the hunter himself, because he's baited a hook for his brother, knowing exactly what he's doing; and he's got this red stew stirring, and he's ready for his brother, and his plan has been enacted, because normally when your brother asks you for stew, you slop some in a bowl and chuck it at him. But Jacob interestingly says, "First sell me your birthright."

Now, let's talk: birthright. So when we hear that, we think mostly of inheritance, in our sense of the word, and you're going, "Death tax," and you're thinking about all the stuff that goes into a will, meeting with attorneys; and that's certainly part of the birthright. Now if you'd like to know what God says about the birthright and how it was supposed to work among His people, well that gets codified later in Deuteronomy 21:17. And the way it worked in just a basic economic way is however many kids you had – if you had four kids, then the inheritance was divided into five parts, and the firstborn son would receive two parts, and so it was quite the advantage, right? If you have seventeen sons, it's divided into eighteen parts, and son number one gets two parts, and everybody else gets a single part. That's how Deuteronomy laid it out.

We can assume that's how it was working in Genesis before it was codified. But you start to see how advantageous it is when you only have two sons, because now that firstborn receives two-thirds, and two-thirds of this vast estate – I mean, Abraham was a wealthy man. He had so much cattle and livestock and camels and goods and servants; we saw that on display. Now to look at where this is going, we have a two-thirds/one-third kind of a split, and Jacob is calculating, because that's what he's good at. He may not be climbing through a ravine to find some yucky hog caught on the edge of a cliff and renting a helicopter with a shotgun or something extremely

awesome like that. But Jacob's smart and wily, and he's baited the hook, and he says, "Sell me your birthright."

You see, the birthright was a negotiation; and in ancient texts, in the newsy text in Mesopotamia, it was not uncommon for a person to barter or sell their birthright for a flock of sheep or whatever the price was, depending on its value. No matter what the value of this vast estate was, this is a bad deal for Esau. But Jacob appeals to Esau's fleshliness. He appeals to his animalistic nature. He out-foxes the fox, he out-hunts the hunter. He sets this thing up to procure that promise. And we don't know if his mother is complicit in this thing, if she whispered in his ear what the prophecy was. But we know that Jacob is being Jacob, and Esau is being Esau, and it's a reminder to us that one of the most powerful forces in this entire world is human nature; and because we learned in Genesis in the earliest pages of this book, human nature is stained and influenced and persuaded by sin. We see that in both of these boys' interaction.

Jacob's not a heroic figure in this scene, he's deceptive and dishonest. And Esau is no better. Esau is a natural man in every way, driven by his appetites, disregarding this significant birthright. But the main import here and the reason the text ends with that emphasis of despising his birthright is because in this family there's far more than camels and tents and servants at stake. In this family, the heritage, the inheritance, the birthright has a spiritual component to it, because this is a family not merely made by man, but a family called and made by God, part of God's plan in working out salvation for this world, that three-cornered promise that God gave to Abraham of a land and a people and to be a blessing to all the world, that's what's behind this birthright.

And for Jacob to be grabbing at it, there may just have been materialism in his motivation. But with this birthright comes a whole lot more. It comes that direct line of blessing that Yahweh has promised not only for this family, but for the ends of the earth. And Jacob had to have understood that there was great significance to that in the same way that Esau understood that he didn't care about that kind of thing. He was a natural man, a man of appetite, a man of aggression, a man willing to trade all that was his father's and his grandfathers for a quick bite. That's why the emphasis is, "He despised his birthright."

You see how naturalistic, animalistic this is, after Jacob's little hook? "First sell me your birthright," verse 31. Verse 32, "Esau said, 'Behold, I'm about to die; so what of use then is the birthright to me?'" That's the logic of a very hungry man. "And Jacob said, 'First swear to me'; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. And then Jacob gave Esau bread," – and this is where the shoe drops – "lentil stew," – beans, really? – "and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way."

Verse 34 is packed with action words, it's packed with verbs: "Esau ate and drank and rose and went." A total disregard for his birthright, a total disregard for his heritage, a total disregard for his family, a total disregard for his spiritual inheritance. He had no regard for his father in this transaction, he had no regard for his grandfather Abraham. These boys would have grown up in the tail end of their grandfather's life. Their teenage years would have been in interaction with this great patriarch Abraham. They would have heard Abraham's stories about God's faithfulness in leading him and his family, of God's preserving Abraham even in his follies, of God's faithful work in Abraham and providing a substitute for his son Isaac on the mountain that day. They would have heard Abraham's stories of God rescuing Lot, of God providing for Abraham and bringing Abraham and preserving Abraham. Abraham would have told these young boys when they were on his knee, "Little fellas, twin boys," rascal in one knee and the hunter hairy red one on the other knee, Abraham would have been telling them about the faithfulness and promise of God reaffirmed and reaffirmed throughout his life, and it would have sunk down into them.

But the thing is about spiritual influence in a young boy's life is sometimes it can go in one ear and out the other; and that seems to be what was happening with both of these boys at this point, but especially to Esau. Esau's concerns are entirely natural. Esau's concerns are, "Gulp and go"; he'll just go hunting some more. That divine revelation given to Rebekah about the primacy of the younger over the older, that reversal of expectations, that subservience of the firstborn, the special privileges that would be forfeited here, changing everything that we would expect, this heel-grabber taking the place of preeminence, these twins being reversed in their order, as Esau dismissively sells his birthright for a few bites of food – indifference, and seeing it all as insignificant.

It sets us up for quite the story to follow. So memorable, so powerful. Jacob: so cunning, smart, sophisticated, refined, probably organized and administrative, as we see later in his life, conscientious, detail-oriented,

efficient, calculating, sharp. Esau: strong, aggressive, goes and goes and goes, can't pin him down.

Jeanne Steig wrote a poem called "Twins" about this episode. I remember reading it when I was younger - a couple days ago:

Esau said, "I'm feeling faint."

"Aw," said Jacob, "no you ain't."

"Papa's blessing," Esau cried, "is mine by right. But I'll have died of hunger first. For pity's sake - my birthright for your lentils, Jake."

"Your birthright?" Jacob murmured. "Sold! Dig in, before the stuff gets cold."

What a scene. What a memorable moment in biblical history. But there's so much more here for us, and that's where I'd like to conclude our time and transition to taking the Table in a few minutes. I want to show you how we should respond to a text like this, how ought we to think about what's going on here. And I think this text invites us to respond in three ways, three ways.

Number one, I think we ought to "marvel at God's indestructible promise through all of it," through the personalities, through the scheming, through the animalistic nature of Esau, through the favoritism of the parents, through the extraordinary circumstances of their birth, the long period of infertility that Isaac and Rebekah had; the adventures of Abraham, and then his death, which seems to leave us with no hero on this page. This timeless tale, this struggle for the ages, this epic moment in salvation history, in all of history ought to cause us, first off, to marvel at God's indestructible plan.

As Dr. Lawson wisely said last week: "Even the death of Abraham cannot stop God's plan." And those words "after the death of" remind us that the faith of Abraham is ultimately not what's crucial here, it's the faithfulness of Yahweh; and that's still on display. And it's hard to know at this time in human history the characters in the story had no idea exactly what was coming forward. We can read through to Genesis chapter 50 and see that what one meant for evil, God meant for good. We can see the arrangements

of the toledots lining out the generations. But in a moment of history, in a time like this when you don't know if the world's on the brink of World War III, or if there's going to be complete economic desolation, or if things are going to turn around at midterms. We have no idea where we are in history right now. But we can be sure of this, that God's plan is indestructible.

You can have a conniving set of twins; you can have aggressive, unspiritual man; you can have Jacob being an unconverted rascal for most of his life; and you can be absolutely sure, whether it's the end of an era or a historical turning point like this one, you can be sure that even if there's Isaac at the center of the next three chapters – who is no Abraham – you can know that God is on His throne, and that He is working and He is accomplishing all His purposes; because ultimately this story and this story isn't about the individual characters and the brief days of their lives, this story is about God; and in God's story, there is no one who is indispensable. And that doesn't only drop your significance in this world, it elevates it as you connect with God's higher purpose.

God's servants die, God raises up fallible leaders. God chooses, and God rejects. But God's cause continues, because God is perfectly capable. This is the doctrine of dispensability. MacArthur says it all the time. He says, "If I put my hand in a bucket of water and I pull it out, the water remains the same," meaning, "You remove one man from the scene, one man from the church, one man from the pages of church history, one man from this biblical story, you bring in this period of great conflict and tumultuousness, and here's that water, undisturbed and serene; fills right back up again."

Reminds me of Isaiah 46:3-4, when God says to Israel, "I'm the one who carried you. I'm the one who carried you." Yahweh is totally independent, and no matter where we are, on this page, or on this page in history, we can be sure that God's promise will not be deterred, not by a rascal, not by a hunter, not by the death of the faithful patriarch. Nothing can stop God's plan; that's the first response.

Second response, "We need to remember God's undeserved grace." And that's what's being portrayed here. As these chapters unfold in the coming weeks and months as you study the book of Genesis, you will be so unimpressed with Jacob, you will be so annoyed with his calculating, conniving ways, and you will repeatedly say, "Why, God, did You choose this guy?" And I hope that in the morning after you've sat with that thought

on your pillow all night long, you get up and you look in the mirror and you say the same exact thing: "God, how could You choose this guy?" because what we have here with Jacob is we have the kind of person God chooses. It's the kind of person God chooses.

Jacob's a rascal. But you know what? He's God's rascal. God's going to redeem this man. God's going to change this man. God is going to take this sinful, conniving, domesticated, chess-playing, in so many ways, despicable, calculator, grasper, usurper, and He's going to humble him and turn him into Israel.

That's why this origin story is so important, it sets the stage for both Jacob and Esau being unworthy. And God chooses one, Jacob, and not the other, Esau, and it's not because Esau was worse. That is so important if you're going to have a biblical understanding of grace. God didn't choose you because you're better than your sibling, or you're better than your neighbor, or you're a more worthy recipient of His salvation; God chose you because He loved you, He loved you, not because of you, not because of any merit in you, not because of any worth in you.

And when God describes His choice of Israel both as a person named Jacob and as a nation of His choosing, He reminds them in Deuteronomy that it is not because of anything in them, because that is how grace works. It is completely undeserved, and it's unguessable, and it reverses our expectations. In this case we see God choosing the younger instead of the older, and we see Him choosing a man who is not worthy to be chosen. And that's exactly how God operates. When we get a hold of Jacob the rascal, we understand that that's the kind of people that God saves.

Jesus would say it well: "It's not the healthy who need a physician, but the sick." He came into the world to save sinners, sinners like Jacob. God's choice is sovereign, and the glory goes to God and God alone. It's nothing in you that God saw that caused Him to reach down and rescue you from sin and death and hell, it's all of grace, it's a testimony to God's sovereign mercy.

A third necessary response – and I think this is the big takeaway – is, "We have to guard against what's unholy and profane." The central focus of this paragraph is Esau. And though the paradigmatic setup is here of Jacob

and Esau in their wily ways, their determined ways, the emphasis lies on Esau. And the first readers would have walked away, both disgusted with Jacob's wiliness, but far more appalled by Esau's indifference. We need to guard ourselves against all that is unholy and profane.

The emphasis in Esau's life is on the here and now. It's on the animalistic, it's on the appetite, it's on the innate desire. And Esau will live his whole life that way, he will constantly be an instant gratification kind of a guy. And it's that sinful nature that serves as a warning to us to never disregard or develop a hard heart to be calcified against God's work, God's word, our spiritual heritage, and God's grace.

You see, Esau becomes representative of all that rejects God, of all that runs from God; and it's in this scene that he makes it crystal clear. And though he'll have a lot of regrets later in his life, and he'll say, "Jacob, you tricked me," and he'll try to win his brother back at the reconciliation, the heart of this man is self-serving, naturalistic, unholy, and profane. He despised his birthright, and it didn't come down to, "Oh no, he went from two-thirds to one-third of Mesopotamian riches," it came down to he looked at the faith of his grandfather Abraham, and he looked at the faith of his father Isaac, and as he looked down his line of descendants, he had no regard for spiritual things. And that's the most dangerous place to be in the universe, to see what is spiritual, to be entrusted with what is godly, to have that spiritual heritage and for it to be just stone-hearted, indifferent, cold, unholy, and worst of all, profane. Esau traded being a blessing to the whole world. Esau traded the special favor of his Creator. Esau traded the extraordinary privilege of being in the place of God's choice and grace and promise and plan, for a few bites to go into his stomach.

First Corinthians 6 says, "Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will destroy them both." And that chapter is talking about biblical sexual ethics. If you live for your appetite, if you live for your natural desire, it will be no surprise to anyone who's read this book that you will have no regard for spiritual things. They will not be prized, they will not bring delight to you, they'll be a matter of indifference.

This is how the author of Hebrews understands this story; and I invite you to turn there, as we prepare our hearts for the Lord's Supper. It's in Hebrews chapter 12. This book has been about encouraging perseverance in faith; and

provided for its readers is that classic hall of faith, those like Abraham, who's given as an example in his faith.

In verse 17 of chapter 11, "Abraham considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, in which he also received him back as a type. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on his staff." That's the scene that's just been presented in Hebrews 11, the hall of faith, the overcoming power of faith, the keep on believing and keep on trusting and don't turn back to your former manner of life; that's the message of the book of Hebrews. And the thing that can mess it up for you is to get entangled in sin, Hebrews 12:1. It's to turn aside from the grace of God.

It's the horrible danger of apostasy, of proving your faith to be fake. And as he gives this example of the importance of persevering in your Christian life, he talks about the benefit of discipline in your physical body, discipline in your spiritual pursuits. And as you move forward through Hebrews chapter 12, look at verse 12: "Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out a joint, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord."

All of this is about holiness, isn't it. It's all about the pursuit of holiness. It's about sanctification. It's about continuing on in the grace of God. And the primary concern of this author, this New Testament author, is seen in verse 15: "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God." To be so close to spiritual blessing and benediction, to be so close to spiritual benefit, to be raised in a godly home, to be the inheritor of the spiritual promises of God; so many young people find themselves in this exact place a, a place of extraordinary spiritual privilege. And the warning is, verse 15, "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up causing trouble, and by it many be defiled." In verse 16, he provides an example.

What's an example of coming so near to spiritual blessing, to being so close to the grace of God, the promise of God, the plan of God, but of not guarding and not valuing and not caring? Well, there's no finer example in all the Bible in this author's mind than he provides in verse 16, "that there



be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when you desire to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears."

The great takeaway from this text is not some wisdom about inheritance. It's not even, you know, what a crooked stick God will eventually change in Jacob. The great takeaway is a warning to never let your exposure to spiritual things harden your heart and make you godless and indifferent.

You have a great privilege in a spiritual heritage, if you grow up in a Christian home. As your parents are raising your kids in the fear and admonition of the Lord, as you're teaching them Bible songs, as you're bringing them to church, as they're going to Sunday School, it's a reminder to every single one of us to warn our kids and to warn our own hearts, that just because you're close to spiritual realities, just because you come to church on Sunday, just because you grew up hearing hymns sung in church - Esau sat on his grandfather Abraham's knee and he heard stories of God's covenant faithfulness, and he traded all of it for his belly. That's the danger of devaluing God's grace, of being unholy and profane.

I'm going to have the deacons get the bread ready, because it's a most appropriate transition for us to take the Lord's Supper together this morning.