

Learning from Esau's unbelief

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MBBC, Sunday March 6, 2022, morning

Text: Ge 25:34 says, "Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright."

The title of this message is "Learning from Esau's unbelief".

Esau did a very dumb thing. It cost him his birthright and blessing. He sold his birthright for a bowl of pottage. He traded his inheritance from God for nothing more than a bowl of red beans. We can scoff at the foolishness of Esau. But we must ask ourselves, for what price are we willing to sell our inheritance from God? Is it true that everyone has their price? Esau's fault is in all of us. Like Esau, we want to do things our way. And most will pay any price to do so. By any price, I mean pay an eternal price. Some will pay an eternal debt in the fires of hell with their souls. Some believers will pay with their eternal losses mentioned in First Corinthians 3:15.

It is easy to judge others like Esau in hindsight and condemn foolish thinking and actions. However, stepping back to take a broader view of decisions made by humanity, to include ourselves, gives us a better perspective of the bad decisions we make.

When we denounce the foolish, we denounce ourselves. How many times have you chosen to reject God's will for your life, to disobey Him, and to reject Him? If you are saved, you have been delivered from the condemnation that comes with sin. But you have not escaped the foolishness and folly of your carnal body of flesh. You have not escaped the fallibility of your mind. Yet God still loves you. God loves you despite yourself. And He loves us all.

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And Ro 5:8 says, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." God has the infinite ability to love the unlovable.

We have a merciful Savior who did not cast us aside and write us off because of our obstinance, our preference for sin, and our rejection of Him. We should do likewise and not dismiss those who reject God and walk in the ways of Esau. Our admonition to be like God comes from Mt 5:48, where Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

The pottage Esau purchased for his birthright was a bowl of red beans. And because of its color, Esau was nicknamed Edom. Edom means red. Esau was nicknamed after the bowl of beans he purchased with his birthright. That color and foolish decision stuck to him for the rest of his life and to this day. He is known as the man who sold his God-given gift for a bowl of beans.

It is shameful and embarrassing to be associated with such a dumb decision. But I want us to consider the question, for what am I willing to sell out my birthright? What will be my bowl of beans? What will I desire more than what God has given to me?

Esau preferred to do things his way. He despised God's way. He did not want God's way. He did not want God's will for his life. He had other plans. He thought he had better plans. But the day came when he discovered he was wrong. And by the time, he discovered he was wrong, it was too late to change his situation.

Esau discovered there is a deadline to make the right decision. But he discovered this when it was too late.

Another group of people discovered too late that God's way was the right way. In Matthew 7:21–23, Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

This is a particularly sad story. These people obviously were sincere and working hard to get into heaven. They did everything they knew to do to please God. They sound convincingly genuine in the plea to explain why they should be accepted by God. As they said, they cast out devils, prophesied in God's name, and they did many wonderful works all in **His** name. I would dare say there was not a more dedicated and sincere people than these. They put all their might into pleasing God and giving Him all the honor.

And yet Jesus said, depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Does that sound right? Does that sound merciful? Yes. It was the right thing to say. God said it. If it sounds cruel to you, you need to examine yourself to find the flaw in your thinking.

I described these people as devoted and sincere. But God said He rejected them. He did not approve of their efforts. In fact, He said they were workers of iniquity. In other words, what these people said was not what God knew about them.

This means these folks were devoted to the wrong thing **and sincerely wrong**. They were obviously devoted to doing what they thought was right. And herein lies the problem. They were doing what they thought was right. They were doing things their way. They appeared to be serving God, but they were serving themselves. They were trying to be righteous to please God. But in doing so, they were rejecting God's righteousness in preference for their own righteousness. They were insisting on their **self**-righteousness. They were boasting of what **they** did and **glorifying** themselves. They said to Jesus, look at what **we** have done.

Jesus also rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for the same problem of self-righteousness in Matthew 23:25-28, saying, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."

Jesus was getting to the heart of the matter. The scribes and Pharisees were focused on that which they could do. They were focused on the outward appearance. They were doing things their own way. Three problems are revealed in what Jesus told the Pharisees.

Problem number one revealed is being focused on what they could do.

Ro 3:20 says, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." And Ro 3:28 says, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."

Ro 4:5 says, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

Paul wrote in Romans 3:267-28 "Where [is] boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."

Job 9:20 explains the problem of self-righteousness, saying, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse."

The problem with **the** scribes and the Pharisees, **the** folks who did many wonderful works in God's name, and **all other** legalists who believe that their deeds will save them, is their self-righteousness. Self-righteousness is the problem. Self-righteousness will not justify anyone in the eyes of God. The only righteousness that is acceptable to God is His righteousness. By pointing to all that they had done in order to justify themselves, they condemned themselves. Rather than declaring all that they had done, they should have been declaring all that **God** had done for them.

A legalist is one who believes that their good deeds are required for salvation. To them works are not merely the fruit of salvation. To them works are required for salvation.

Let us learn from their mistakes. When you stand before the throne of God, and He asks why you should be allowed to enter heaven, point to Christ and say because of all the wonderful works He has done!

As Tit 3:5 says, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

Problem number two, revealed in the example of the Pharisees who said they had many wonderful works, is being focused on the outward appearance to please God. As with problem number one, legalists focus on what they see, not what God sees.

Paul wrote in 1Co 13:12, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." We cannot see within our hearts as God sees us, but we can see what the Word of God tells us.

1Sa 16:7 explains the difference between how we look at ourselves and how God looks at us, saying, "But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."

What does God see when He looks into our hearts? Jer 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”

This is why Pr 28:26 warns, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.” We can’t trust our own hearts. We think we are better than we are. We must trust God and His Word, which tells us our hearts are desperately wicked and deceptive. We must trust what the Word of God says, not what we think. He is the reference point of truth to which we must appeal and orient ourselves.

Problem number three revealed in those doing wonderful works is they were doing their own will. This is the same problem with the scribes and Pharisees and with Esau. They were doing their own will, not God’s will.

In Matthew 7:21–23, Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” What is the will of the Father?

Jesus said in Joh 6:40, “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.” Believing on Him is relying on Him and His Word and His truth.

2Pe 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Repentance is changing what **you** believe is true to believing what **God** says is true.

In Mt 23:37, Jesus states the problem with not repenting. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!”

John 3:15 says, “That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” Eternal life is given to those who believe God’s work must save us, not our works.

In Joh 12:46, Jesus said, “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” Ga 2:16 explains that believing is not a work. “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” When you believe the truth that Christ’s work is sufficient, you believe your works are not. If you believe your works are necessary to be saved, you reject the sufficiency of Christ’s work. When you believe your works are necessary for salvation, you call God a liar. That is no way to get into heaven.

It is difficult for most to admit, but there is nothing we can do to convince God we are good enough to save. It is not possible to convince God that He made the right choice in giving us grace in exchange for our attempts to do good.

Grace is all God, 100%, or not God at all. Romans 11:6, “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.”

We deceive ourselves thinking what we do will gain us reward and salvation. Pr 16:25 warns of relying on our way, saying, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

Eph 2:8-9 declares, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

Esau, alias Edom, sold out his divine birthright for a bowl of beans. He insisted on doing things his way. The scribes and Pharisees insisted on doing things their way. Legalists insist on doing things their way.

What will you insist on? Your way or God's way? Your answer will determine where you spend eternity.