

**Genesis 36: 1-43; “The Earthly Inheritance of Esau”, Sermon # 96 in the series –
“Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on July 14th, 2019,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

As we consider together this morning the verses that I have just read to you, I think that we must ask the question – Why did God give one whole chapter of the book of Genesis to the listing of Esau’s descendants? Why, if the lineage of Jesus Christ was to descend through Jacob, does Esau get such particular attention? Well, there are no doubt a number of reasons why. Esau was the son of Isaac, and as such, he does deserve some attention as to the outcome of his life. And also, Esau’s descendants were in time to become some of the greatest enemies and even persecutors of the Old Testament people of God; and as such, we need to know who was placed in this category.

But I believe that the main reason that we have this genealogy given to us here, was that God wanted to provide a contrast between believers and unbelievers in their inheritance. What becomes of those who despise and neglect God and His ways, versus what becomes of those who believe in God’s promises and live by the truth of His Word? What will their inheritance be? It appears from these verses that Esau’s descendants were very great men in their day, and in the place that they lived, but now they are simply names on a page, and difficult names at that.

There is, however, a valuable principle of truth which is here for us to remember, and I pray that each of us will remember it for the rest of our life here upon the earth. Whatever greatness and glory that you attain to in this life, whatever level of riches and fame that you attain to; all that you will have, if you do not have faith in God and Christ, will be an inheritance that will be lost and destroyed. You will have pursued earthly things only, but since you did not pursue God, you will lose your soul. This is the lesson of Esau and Mt. Seir. He and his descendants are given a whole chapter in the book of Genesis as a warning to all men that there is no lasting inheritance to be found in pursuing your own greatness in this world.

God may give earthly greatness to a man, and to his descendants for a time, but if that man does not have faith in God and Christ, he will lose everything he has built for himself, and he will find himself miserable and in hell at last. So the question that I want to ask of the text this morning is this: What did Esau and his descendants pursue, as to their inheritance, that you and I as believers should avoid if we would have an everlasting inheritance? Esau pursued earthly greatness and he did not seek God and the heavenly inheritance, in the following ways:

1st – He pursued earthly greatness in the way that he went about getting married and raising a family. (verses 1-14)

The chapter begins with telling us that Esau and Edom are the same person. You probably remember the story. It is found in Genesis 25, verses 29-34. It is the story of how Esau sold his birthright to Jacob. Let’s review it together for a moment so that we can set the stage for our observations on this text. “Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary.” “And Esau said to Jacob, ‘Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary.’” “But Jacob said, ‘Sell me your birthright as of this day.’” “And Esau said, ‘Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?’” “Then Jacob said, ‘Swear to me as of this day.’” “So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.” “And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way.”

“Thus Esau despised his birthright,” is the comment made in the Scriptures. Esau’s name of Edom stems from this incident when he was a young man. Edom means, “red”, and it refers to the color of the lentil stew that Jacob prepared for him. Esau when he was born, it says that, “he came out all red”. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. All these things show us how Esau also came to be known as Edom. This incident of his selling his birthright also shows us how he came to be labeled “profane” by the writer of the book of

Hebrews. Turn with me over to Hebrews chapter 12, and verse 14. It says here: “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord; looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.” “For You know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it diligently with tears.”

This was the character of Esau. He was a profane man. To be profane is to be a person who treats holy things as though they were common. Selling his birthright was something that Esau did without any deep thought about it; even though his right as the first-born, included the blessings and the promises of the covenant of grace that had been extended to Abraham and Isaac. It would have been Esau’s, had he not despised it. I am not speaking of the purpose of God, which was, that Jacob should in time come to have both the birthright and the blessing. I am speaking of Esau’s sinful and profane heart, a heart which thought and reasoned that these great, and eternal, and awesome blessings, were worth no more than a morsel of food.

In his mind he put them on the same level; he made no distinction as to their value. This is a sin of the heart and mind which you and I as Christians are warned against falling into. “What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?” “Or what will he give in exchange for his soul?” Esau is saying: I will take a little food to satisfy my temporary hunger for it, and I will have no thought about the loss of my birthright. And thus, he despised God and His great blessings, in that one act. This is why he came to have no eternal inheritance. He is also called a fornicator in the passage in Hebrews.

In his case, I take this to mean that he went about to take wives for himself, without any reference to God or to what his parents might think. He did not care a thing about God’s institution of marriage. But since marriage was generally regarded as right, he determined that he would marry and have a number of wives. But he would not be hemmed in by the divine revelation of the standards of his godly parents. He would despise their counsel. It says in Genesis 26, verse 34 – “When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite.” “And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah.”

It also says in Genesis 28: 6 – “Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, ‘You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan,’ and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Padan Aram.” “Also Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac.” “So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had.” He did not feel in the least bad about this.

He had despised his birthright. It was no big deal to despise his parent’s teaching and counsel about the kind of girl, or girls in this case, that he should marry. In verse 2 of chapter 36 it says, “Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite; Aholibamah the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite; and Basemath, Ishmael’s daughter, sister of Nebajoth.” “Now Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, and Basemath bore Reuel.” “And Aholibamah bore Jeush, Jaalam, and Korah.” “These were the sons of Esau born to him in the land of Canaan.” It is obvious from these accounts that his wives went by more than one name, just as Esau himself did.

Now I hope that you can see that Esau’s profaneness and his sin of sensuality which led to the fornication and to taking many wives, were all linked together with his pursuit of earthly greatness and the kind of inheritance that he sought. He had many wives and he had many children by these wives. Those children, in turn, had many children, and so Esau had many

children and grandchildren before Jacob had children at all. It all seems so easy to Esau the unbeliever, the godless and profane man. He is going to have every good thing of this life that God can give him, but he will not recognize God's hand in any of it. God will be faithful to uphold what He had promised to him in the blessing that Isaac did give him. It says in Genesis 27: 39, "Behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above." He had the earthly blessings, and God would give them to him in abundance.

But he has no sense of his sin against Almighty God, feels no obligation to ask himself what God requires, feels no need of repentance for the whole time between the age of 15 when he sold the birthright and 52 when he cried out after Jacob stole his blessing. He is looking for Isaac to change his mind about who he gave the blessing to. He is not thinking of changing his own mind in regard to his sin. And he could care less about the grief that he has caused his parents. Esau truly was a profane man. He wanted no spiritually lasting inheritance from his father's God. He would throw eternal life away, not wanting it at all until it was too late! Oh, how I pray that none of us here today will pursue earthly greatness in this way; wanting everything out of life in the here now upon this earth, but you will not attend to your heart and the needs of your soul. You will not receive God's Word or His great salvation.

Where will it end? It will end with the loss of your soul. It will end in hell. But it will not end in this way if you will cry out to Jesus Christ. Do not let the delay of blessings that you long for make you think that the way of the earth, the way of a worldling is better than the way of the Christian. The trials and testings of faith are all for your good. The supposedly easy way of the worldly and the profane will end in disaster. "The way of the transgressor is hard." (Proverbs 13: 5) I would warn you of these things this morning so that you might have what is the very best in the eternal sense.

2nd – Esau pursued earthly greatness in the way that he viewed himself and his descendants. (verses 15-19)

Verses 15 to 19 all speak about "the chiefs of the sons of Esau". All of Esau's grandsons appear to have been called chiefs. Now what is this but the creation of some sort of social nobility among them, which made them appear to be greater than they really were? They evidently thought of themselves as great military men. The text does not mention one act of valor, one deed of kindness, or one virtuous act which would commend any of these men to us, in a lasting sense. They evidently simply thought of themselves as great warriors and liked being called chief. They liked building up every aspect of their personal dignity and authority and ability.

Chief is not simply a title of respect like Mister or Mrs. It is a title which elevates the man to a position of being greater than others around him, a position in which a man does not care to have others on the same level as himself. A chief only cares that he is the one in charge. He only cares that he, the one who holds this title, will be listened to and obeyed, in all situations. The Dictionary that I consulted says, "Foremost in importance, principal, main; at the head; most influential." But again, in our text, there is nothing of significance mentioned in terms of what any of these men had done to distinguish themselves with deserving such a title.

Where did they learn this? They learned it from their fathers and from their grandfather Esau. They learned it also from the Horites who they associated with. This was no doubt the way that Esau wanted to see himself and his grandsons. Perhaps they thought of themselves as great nobles of a kingdom. The title in the King James is "dukes". But still, it is a little much, that all of the grandsons have to be called dukes or chiefs as well. Who promoted them to this office? Perhaps they wanted to be seen as great warriors, but whatever; it is nothing but earthly greatness that is being sought for; and that, among or over, other men. It is nothing before God.

Listen to a few verses from God's word to expose this foolishness. Psalm 62, verse 9 says, "Surely men of low degree are a vapor, men of high degree are a lie; if they are weighed on the

scales, they are altogether lighter than vapor.” And Psalm 75: 4-7 says – “I said to the boastful, ‘Do not deal boastfully,’ and to the wicked, ‘Do not lift up your horn on high; do not speak with a stiff neck.’” “For exaltation (or promotion) comes neither from the west nor from the south.” “But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another.” “For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is fully mixed, and He pours it out; surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down.” “But I will declare forever, I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.”

Contrast the attitude of the wicked, and those who want to be “chief”, with what David says in Psalm 16, verse 2 and following. “O my soul, you have said to the Lord, ‘You are my Lord, my goodness is nothing apart from You.’” “As for the saints who are on the earth, ‘They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.’” “Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another god; their drink offerings of blood I will not offer, nor take up their names on my lips.” “O Lord, you are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot.” “The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yes I have a good inheritance.” This is the attitude and the language of the Christian if he is walking humbly with his Lord. He does not want to be called chief.

But I fear, as I say this, that there are far too many of Christ’s disciples who want positions of greatness; who want to be called chief. And so, turn with me over to Matthew 20, and verse 20. “Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him.” “And He said to her, ‘What do you wish?’” “She said to Him, ‘Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.’” “But Jesus answered and said, ‘You do not know what you ask.’” “Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with?” “They said to Him, ‘We are able.’”

“So He said to them, ‘You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on my left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.’” “And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers.” In the King James version of this next verse it says, “But Jesus called them unto him, and said, ‘Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.’” “But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.” (that is, your slave)

“Even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” So, you see, it is not greatness that the Christian should seek for, but rather to serve and to give of yourself to others; laying down your life for the brethren. “He who would save his life shall lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake and the gospels,” Jesus says, “shall find it”. Ask yourself now – Do I really need to be chief? Do I really need to run everything and exercise authority over others? If God has given me that authority, certainly it is good. But if not, it is not necessary. If you turn over to Luke 22, verse 24, you will find the parallel account to Matthew 20, and these words.

“And there was also a dispute among them, which of them should be considered the greatest.” In this passage Jesus goes on to say in the King James version in verse 26, “But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.” Jesus does not destroy or nullify the office of a leader or his authority. But he does establish what true greatness is. Verse 27 says, “For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves?” “Is it not he who sits at the table?” “Yet I am among you as the One who serves.”

So, let us be clear about this, true greatness in this life and the next comes on the basis of your being a servant here and now in this life. You are the servant of God first, and then you learn to serve others around you, according to Christ’s commandment; according to His leading

and power, because of the grace that has been given to you. This is the inheritance that you work for; that which is mentioned by Jesus in verses 28-30. “But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials.” “And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Now although Christ is speaking to His apostles in the first and primary sense, and He is referring to their authority in terms of judging the twelve tribes of Israel, it does have reference to all believers as well. For it says in 1 Corinthians 6: 2 – “Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world?” This kingdom that Jesus says that He will bestow, is for those who stand by the Lord’s cause of truth and meekness, and righteousness. This inheritance comes to those who will not run away from serving others in the church but who will stand by them and truly help them in all their trials and afflictions, even as the apostles stood by the Lord Jesus in all of His trials.

This is the inheritance of the godly. The meek shall inherit the earth. The peacemakers shall be called the sons of God. The poor in spirit shall have the kingdom, and those who mourn over their sin shall be comforted. No, we need not be chiefs here in order to have an everlasting inheritance. We simply need to trust in Jesus Christ for salvation, and then have the grace to learn to serve others.

3rd – Esau pursued earthly greatness in his relationships with the people of the land of Seir. (verses 20-43)

You can see from verses 20-30, that a genealogy of the sons of Seir was placed right in the middle of the genealogy of Esau. Why was this? Well, I believe that it was because Esau was allied by marriage to this Seir, the Horite, “who inhabited the land”. Esau had married his niece Aholibamah. We find that in verse 2; and again in verse 25. If we remember that Esau had sold his birthright, and lost his blessing, then should it be any wonder that he would enter into an alliance with the Horites so that he could find some greatness in this world? He was looking to ally himself with the great “chiefs” of this world; men of power and position in this world, people who would approve of his goals and his spirit.

Seir’s people had become his people. He probably felt closer to them than he did to his own immediate family. They lived close to him, they had the same interests as he did. Do you remember that it says in verse 6 that Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the persons of his household, his cattle and all his animals, and all his goods which he had gained in the land of Canaan, and went to a country away from the presence of his brother Jacob? It is true that in verse 7 it says – “For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together, and the land where they were strangers could not support them because of their livestock.”

This was a legitimate reason for moving, but did he have to move completely out of the country? I think that Esau felt that he had to. But verse 6 seems to imply that Esau did not really feel comfortable and free when he was around Jacob. So he “sought another country”, that is, he wanted to live in Seir. He built his house, probably in the craggy mountains of that country which are so beautiful, and he probably conducted hunting parties into the place which is now known as Petra. It is a beautiful, awesome and wild place. I am sure that it was much to his liking.

But this leads me to ask a question this morning which I believe is appropriate to the state of your heart, and your desires. Do you feel the most comfortable when you are around the people of God; the people who have been converted to Jesus Christ, the people who are sojourning through this world? Or do you feel better with the people of the world, pursuing worldly interests and worldly pleasures with little or no thought about God? What are your greatest goals and interests? Perhaps you believe that you could be more devoted to God in a different geographical setting. You may think that if you moved to Colorado or Montana that all

of your problems would be solved, and all of your earthly desires would be realized. Does it bother you to try by faith, to be devoted to God and to serve God and His people, in this area; in this place? If you had your chance, and if you had your choice, would you move away from the presence of your brethren here? Would you feel relieved in doing so? If you say, "Yes", then I am afraid that your soul may be in great danger, and you may not even know it.

Will you really be content, with moving away, and with developing earthly relationships with the people who live around you? Will you really be content to forget what claims God might have upon your life? If you do think about God, will you really be content to think of him only when you are out in beautiful scenery, and only for a few moments on a Sunday, and then the rest of the time is yours, you think, to think and to live as you please? I wonder if you see the problem with this?

God is always with you wherever you are, and wherever you go. Are you most satisfied to be with Him, in His presence, and with His people? It was the world that had Esau's heart. He could enjoy a visit with Jacob but he wouldn't want to live with him, or even be too near to him on a regular basis, I think. Esau would be thinking too much of Mt. Seir. Listen to what a Christian mindset was, in the Old testament times, and see if you can apply it to yourself, a person who lives in New Testament times.

Hebrews 11: 8 – "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance." "And he went out not knowing where he was going." "By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Verse 13 – "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, (that is the fulfillment of them in Christ) but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." "For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland." (a country of their own, it says in the NAS)

That was what Jacob was looking for, that Esau was not. Jacob sought the greatness and the glory of knowing God, and being in God's country. He was not living simply to find the greatness of the things of this world and the people of this world as Esau did. "He desire a better, that is a heavenly country." "Therefore God was not ashamed to be called his God, for He had prepared a city for him." It is Mt. Zion that attracts the Christian's eye. It is the Church of the living God, the Church of the first-born Jesus Christ that you and I have come to, when we come to have faith in the Savior.

It is the greatness of glory of Jesus Christ, and His kingdom that we seek. There is no lasting inheritance for us here in this world. Esau, if we could see him now, has lost everything and is now separated from his beloved Mt. Seir. He thought he was safe there, and that he and his descendants would have a lasting inheritance there; but O how wrong he was. If we had time I would read to you all of Ezekiel 35 and all of the book of Obadiah. But listen to Obadiah verses 1-4, "The vision of Obadiah." "Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom (We have heard a report from the Lord, and a messenger has been sent among the nations, saying, 'Arise, and let us rise up against her for battle);

"Behold, I will make you small among the nations; you shall be greatly despised." "The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; you who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground: Though you ascend as high as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord.'" However, in contrast to this, listen to verse 17. "But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions."

"The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame; but the house of Esau shall be stubble; they shall kindle them and devour them and no survivor shall remain of the

house of Esau." "For the Lord has spoken." Now which inheritance do you really want for your life?" Will it be Mt. Seir (the world) or will it be Mt. Zion (the church)? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will have a heavenly inheritance which will never fade away, and you will live a most satisfying life; one in which God will walk with you.