

“Living with Regret”

July 23, 2017

In the Beginning: (God’s) Family Drama series

Is there anything you’ve ever sold that you wish you hadn’t? In these days of “Cash for Gold” commercials, TV shows like “Storage Wars” and “Antiques Roadshow” where people share the stories behind the items they’re bringing in, or auction sites like E-Bay and Craig’s List, it seems everything is for sale for the right price. But what about afterwards?

Esau finds himself in a mess - and full of regret for giving up something irreplaceable. It’s probably safe to say that all of us have had moments when we've said or done something that we regretted later on. If you haven’t, please tell me your secret!

Whether the consequences were noticeable or not, regret is a very human thing. We carry it. We struggle with it. We want to rid ourselves of it because it weighs on us. It affects us personally, and it affects our relationships.

We’re studying the patriarchs and matriarchs at the root of our faith family tree. Now we’ve come to the second generation after Abraham. Abraham entered into covenant with God along with Sarah. Their son, Isaac, inherited God’s promise. Now we come to Isaac and Rebekah’s children, Abraham’s grandkids, Jacob and Esau.

We usually hear it that way – Jacob and Esau – even though Esau is the older of the two. As we get deeper into our faith family roots, we find interesting relationships! Maybe you’ve heard some your own family stories - some of them incredible, some maybe not so great. That’s why Genesis is so intriguing. We see ourselves here.

There’s a bumper sticker that reads: “We are born naked, wet, and hungry. Then things get worse.” Jacob and Esau were in conflict in Rebekah’s womb, and God told her that it wouldn’t end there.

SHOW SLIDE: Rebekah says, "If it is going to be this way, why go on living?" When they were born, Jacob came out grabbing Esau’s heel.

They were very different from each other, and we know that Isaac and Rebekah played favorites, too. This was more than your average sibling rivalry. This would be raw conflict for many years, and Isaac and Rebekah’s favoritism didn’t help the situation. The usual plan of the older son being in charge didn’t happen here. Jacob would be the one to carry on the promise.

We’re supposed to honor Jacob as one of our faith ancestors, but honestly, he’s a crook. He’s manipulative. He’s an unkind brother who takes advantage of Esau. His

integrity is questionable. He seizes an opportunity to pounce and wins! Part of me wishes that God would let him have it!

As the eldest son, Esau had claim on the birthright. That gave him an identity, a double portion of the family inheritance, and leadership within the family after Isaac's death. It meant power and privilege for him. But we see that he gives it up quickly - and for what? A bowl of stew?

SHOW SLIDE: Esau says, "I'm starving! What good is a birthright if I'm dead?"

The birthright is at the center of this conflict because the birthright carries God's covenant promise. And even though the birthright is something God gives, Abraham had to accept it and pass it down to Isaac, who also had to accept it. But just because God gives it doesn't mean it will automatically be accepted.

That's the nature of faith. God doesn't force us to respond. We have the opportunity to accept God's promises and live a new life. We have the responsibility to pass on the Good News of God and what he does in our lives. That's part of our new life in Christ.

The big deal here is that Esau gives up God's promises. He goes for instant gratification instead of a secure future. Yes, Jacob is conniving for sure, but Esau is just downright careless. He forgets what's really important for the sake of something fleeting. Out of desperation, he makes a deal that forever changes his life. We know that reality – maybe for ourselves, maybe for others – those moments when our decisions have changed to course of life forever.

Though the idea of birthright might seem strange to us, and we may not talk about it much, we hold our birthright as Americans dear. We celebrate our rights and freedoms. We say that all people are created equal – having the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

And far beyond any political thinking, we have a birthright from God. We are more than just physical bodies walking and talking. We are spiritual people with potential beyond just our physical existence. We are created in God's image and called to do God's work.

Think about what we celebrate in baptism. We are united with Jesus Christ in his dying and his rising to new life. We have a birthright – an inheritance in Jesus Christ (from I Peter) that offers eternal life and everlasting hope of something better. It may be some time away, but it's a guarantee! No one can take that away from us, but sadly, we can deny that it's there! We can live for now without any thought of the future. And many times we do.

Jacob and Esau teach us what can happen when we don't claim our birthright – or when we ignore it in search of a something we think is more satisfying - at least for the moment.

One translation of this Scripture says that Esau “despised his birthright.” His regret was so deep that he despised even the covenant from God. Someone wrote, “God can do more with a rascal than with a fool. Jacob was a conniving, cheating scoundrel. But he did care about the covenant...” “Jacob has a sharp mind and no conscience, but Esau is all belly and no brain.”

God will work as God wills, even though we might not understand it. Even though Esau had the claim, God used Jacob. As we've said all along, there's challenge and comfort in that for us. God will use imperfect people for God's purposes.

We destroy ourselves when we give up God's promises. We live with worries and fears of what's ahead instead of knowing God's presence will be with us in any circumstance. We look for satisfaction, but don't find it because human relationships alone can't provide all that we need. We need a relationship with our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer to make it through.

Simply put, Esau made a bad choice. Though our sympathy may be with him because we've all made quick and wrong decisions, he was impulsive. He didn't take time to consider what Jacob was really asking. Perhaps the birthright didn't mean much to Esau. And so when it was all said and done, he was filled with regret for what he had done. And he lived with it for a long time. Eventually, there's reconciliation, but not before a life of struggle.

We are much the same way. Though we may think that Jacob is no good, there's a bigger lesson here. Esau acted without thinking things through. He let momentary need overwhelm him. He satisfied his physical needs without thinking of the future. He lived for a moment of pleasure.

We don't have to wait for much of anything. There's fast food, hot and ready pizza, the ability to deposit checks with a picture from our phones, quick access to money, credit cards so we can buy things without having the real money to do so. Technology makes life go faster and faster. We send messages across the world in seconds. Media gets us news as it's happening with no delay.

Instant gratification is a preferred way of life. True intimacy and trust has been replaced by casual sex. We struggle with drug and alcohol abuse and addiction for many reasons, but there's the need for a momentary high. We desire instant gratification.

And when we do have to wait for anything, our anxiety level increases, and we get angry. When life doesn't go as we'd like it to, we blow up. We've seen people yell in grocery stores when a cashier or bagger is going too slowly. Perhaps we've shown

road rage in a traffic jam. I'll confess that I beeped at someone at a light this week when they didn't go as soon as it turned green!

One poignant movie from my childhood is "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" is coming out. The lesson I remember from that story is patience – of waiting for what we want. One young girl is very determined to get what she wants – and she wants it now! She demands it, but her attitude only gets her into trouble.

We desire instant gratification, and sometimes we give away what is ours to treasure in order to get it. You only have to think about your own life to realize that we get Jacob and Esau because we've been there. And we don't have to look very far to find a story every day that has to do with instant gratification. The respected leader whose family life is ruined because of a bad decision. The business person who earns lots of money while employees aren't earning minimum wage and are being treated poorly. Someone who gets into drugs because everyone else is doing it and then says or does something that's destructive to themselves or others. The driver who gets behind the wheel after drinking or in a rage and causes a tragic accident.

Esau lived for the moment, and it brought him pain and regret – wishing that things had turned out differently. He lost something tangible – the birthright and all that came with it. But even more, he lost time. He spent his life in regret rather than living life in peace and comfort.

Later on, when Isaac is old and losing his sight, he asks Esau to hunt and bring back meat to prepare a meal and then receive a blessing. Rebekah hears the plan and encourages Jacob to fool Isaac into thinking he's Esau so that he can receive the blessing. Take a look: **SHOW** "Isaac's Blessing"

Our decisions have lasting consequences – some more than others. But our human nature is to satisfy our needs as soon as possible. And even those decisions that we think only affect us usually have an effect on someone else. It takes focus and strength to sacrifice for the sake of others.

As we continue in Genesis, we'll see that neither Jacob nor Esau's life is easy. There are bumps along the way, just as there are for us. But this story reminds us about the nature of our God. God doesn't love because of who we are, but because of who God is.

It also reminds us that we can and should stop and think before we speak and act. Perhaps it's a call to prayer for us and a reminder to weigh our choices carefully.

And when we struggle with regret, and many of us do, can we offer it to God with the assurance that God walks with us, can free us from the weight of it, and that God desires that we seek reconciliation?

We'll learn from Jacob and Esau that it's never too late - and that God's presence is sure. Even so, our challenge is to remember God's blessings, treasure them, and receive them as a gift - not a possession.

I invite you into a time of prayer to offer your heart to God. Whether you see yourself in Esau, Jacob, or maybe both of them, know that God is with you.

TIME OF PRAYER to address regret, struggle, etc.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.