

Genesis 25:31-34

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/gen/gen-25/genesis-2531-34/>

Jacob proposes to Esau that he sell him his birthright in exchange for the stew. Esau is so hungry that he doesn't care about his birthright, and willingly sells it to Jacob for one meal.

Rather than give his own brother food, *Jacob* formulates a trade. He offers his brother a deal. *Jacob* tells *Esau* the stew is his if *Esau* would, *First sell me your birthright* (vs 31).

A *birthright* (the rights of a firstborn son) meant that the father acknowledged his firstborn son as his principal heir. Usually this meant taking over the family business/estate when the father died and governing the affairs of the family. The bulk of the stewardship of power and wealth was given to the firstborn son through his birthright.

Esau does not seem to even hesitate. His reply is dramatic, *Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?* (vs 32). Of course, it is apparent from the story that *Esau* was not literally about to die, however hungry he felt at the moment. What *Esau* is really saying is that he is only motivated by his stomach in that moment. He does not care about investing in a future benefit. He only prioritizes satisfying his current appetite. His justification is that a *birthright* is of no *use* if he is *about to die*. Scripture makes clear that our ability to self-justify will not excuse us from being accountable for being good stewards.

Jacob demands a promise, *“First swear to me”* and *Esau* complies: *so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob* (vs 33).

The deal was complete. *Jacob* had the birthright, and *Esau* had one meal: *Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way* (vs 34).

Thus Esau despised his birthright. Here *despised* means he did not give any particular value to his *birthright*. He gave it little consideration. He threw it away like it was trash—which is something we don't give any value. And now *the* birthright belonged to *Jacob*.

It is interesting to contrast what *Esau* inappropriately despised (gave no value) with what *Jesus* appropriately despised (gave no value):

“...who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
(Hebrews 12:2b)

Jesus *despised* or gave no value/consideration to being shamed by the world for following His Father's will in all things. This passage from Hebrews 12 says in fact that *Jesus* “endured such hostility by sinners against Himself” (Hebrews 12:3). *Jesus* was despised and oppressed (Isaiah

53:3, 7). It is not that Jesus didn't care; He asked His Father to take the cup from Him while suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42). Jesus despised the shame of His enemies as compared to the "joy set before Him" of gaining the reward of the inheritance of recovering the reign of humans over the earth (Matthew 28:18; Revelation 3:21). In fact, Hebrews 12 states that after Jesus endured the cross, He "sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

This mindset that Jesus had was one of investing for the future. Jesus suffered and endured rejection from the world today in order to gain the reward of the inheritance in the future. He chose this mindset. New Testament believers are exhorted to choose the same mindset (Philippians 2:5-10). The mindset chosen by Jesus is the exact opposite of the mindset chosen by Esau.

The birthright was the right to reign over the family. In selling his birthright, Esau was expressing a disinterest in his future inheritance. He was saying, "I don't care about later, I just want to satisfy my appetite today." Esau's basic attitude of selling out a future and great reward of inheritance in favor of a meal that will satisfy for only a few hours is used as an example of an attitude believers need to be careful to avoid:

"See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; 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 he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears."
(Hebrews 12:15-17)

In this passage from Hebrews, Esau is called "immoral" and "godless" for neglecting to value his inheritance while it was far in the future. Hebrews 10 exhorts believers to assemble together with one another for the purpose of "encouraging one another" to focus on doing "love and good deeds" now, looking for a future reward; this is the way New Testament believers receive the reward of the inheritance (2 Corinthians 5:10; Colossians 3:23). It can be difficult to invest in others today, when the judgment seems so far away. It's much easier to be like Esau and focus on satisfying our own appetites today. This is why Hebrews says we need to stir one another up "all the more as you see the [judgment] day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:25).

The greatest reward for faithfulness seems to be to share Christ's reign with Him (Revelation 3:21; Philippians 2:5-10; 2 Timothy 2:12). This is the way we possess the reward of our inheritance, through living as faithful witnesses who endure difficulty but continue to walk in obedience to Christ (Colossians 3:23; Revelation 1:3; 3:21). All believers are children of God, and unconditionally have God as their inheritance simply by believing upon Jesus (Romans 8:17a; John 3:14-15). However, some believers will gain the reward of being "fellow heirs with Christ" in reigning over the new earth. Gaining this reward comes with a condition; believers in Jesus are:

“fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.”

(Romans 8:17b)

To be “fellow heirs with Christ” is to share His birthright with Him, as the firstborn over all creation (Colossians 1:15). The image of Esau tells us that if we prioritize the comforts of this world over walking in faithfulness to Christ, following Him in His sufferings of being rejected by the world for living and speaking the truth, then we are selling our birthright for a pot of stew.

Biblical Text

³¹ But Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.” ³² Esau said, “Behold, I am about to die; so of what *use* then is the birthright to me?” ³³ And Jacob said, “First swear to me”; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ 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.