



Sermon

16th July 2023

Birthright

Genesis 25:19-34; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

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The Genesis reading follows on from last week, where Abraham had sent his servant to find a wife for his son, Isaac. Remember there were two major promises that God had made to Abraham: that he would have many descendants and that the land of Canaan was promised to him. These promises were repeated to Isaac and later Jacob in turn. So the story of Isaac's children is very important. It was necessary for the covenant God had made with Abraham to be fulfilled. We have already seen how the line of inheritance had been determined between Ishmael and Isaac, with Ishmael (the son of the servant girl) sent away so as not to threaten the inheritance of the son of the promise of God. Now in the next generation the flow of inheritance is also to be directed as God had ordained.

Through all this family story, there was difficulty with conceiving children. Abraham and Sarah famously so as we know with the miraculous provision of Isaac when Sarah was very old.

We are told here that Isaac was 40 when he married but the twins did not come until he was 60. Twenty years is a long time period of barrenness! But in verse 21, Isaac prayed for her and the Lord answered her prayer; she became pregnant carrying twins: Esau and Jacob.

These two boys were constantly struggling against each other. Esau was the first born but Jacob followed hard on his heels – literally grasping his brother's heel when he was born. So this second-born was named Jacob or Supplanter. And a supplanter he proved to be, until he had a life-changing encounter with God.

When the boys grew up, Esau who had been away hunting, came back hungry and wanted some of the stew Jacob was cooking. Jacob saw his opportunity and bargained for his brother's birthright.

We need to understand something about the birthright. Our birthright is what we gain from being born into our family and what we will inherit. The COD defines birthright as: "rights belonging to one as eldest son, as born in a certain station or country, or as a human being." Here the meaning is the right of the elder son. In Ancient Near East culture, the oldest boy received the double portion, that is, twice as much as each of the others. In return, he was expected to care for his mother and other family dependants after his father's death. So from this rule alone, the young men would expect that when their father died, his estate would be split 2/3 to Esau and 1/3 to Jacob. What was more significant was the covenantal promises of God which were also to be inherited.

In his tiredness and hunger and with the smell of the stew stimulating his appetite, Esau was prepared to trade his inheritance for that bowl of soup. I realised we preparing this sermon, that I have always thought they were swapping inheritances so then Jacob would get the 2/3 and Esau 1/3, but that is not what it says. Esau is selling his birthright to Jacob who would then inherit the lot!

The story is told in a poem called "Twins" by Jeanne Steig:

Esau said, "I'm feeling faint."
"Aw," said Jacob, "no, you aint."
"Papa's blessing," Esau cried,
"Is mine by rights. 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.”¹

Esau got some nice soup and bread – Jacob secured the entire inheritance: his father’s wealth, the promise of the land, the promise of many descendants for himself. So Esau despised his birthright. **He despised his birthright...**

Perhaps surprisingly, there is a common thread with our two New Testament readings.

One’s birthright is what you inherit because of your birth. We all have some inheritance of position, class, influence, wealth or perhaps lack of these things from our natural birth. As Christians, we are born again into a new life. Jesus himself said it in his discussion with Nicodemus:

John 3:3, 5-7 Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. ... ⁵ I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'

In that new life we are heirs of God. Paul says it a bit later in Romans 8:17,

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ ...

What is our inheritance as Christians then?

There are great benefits we receive because Jesus died for us on the Cross. I have spoken before of the exchange of the Cross. I trust we all know that Jesus carried our sins on the Cross so that as we trust him our sins are forgiven and we are granted his righteousness. It was an exchange. He took our sins upon himself and he gave us his righteousness. Paul states it very clearly in 2 Cor 5:21:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God, ...

Think about that: God made Jesus who was sinless, to be sin for us. That is stunning.

But then the second part follows on: "... so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

That is even more astounding. Do you get it? Jesus was made to be sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. That is the great exchange. It is a wonder we cannot fully fathom. Such spiritual agony for Jesus! Such generosity!

But that is not the only exchange, that is not the only inheritance – there is more, much more.

I am going to review a list. Now you are likely to think, "That does not work for me." Nonetheless, these are provisions that Christ has made. We need to receive them by faith and grow into them. Some of them may require working out in our lives – the Bible does say, "Work out your salvation in fear and trembling." Phil 2:12. That does not mean do good works to earn salvation. It means apply the truths of your salvation to your life in respectful obedience to God.

¹ *NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, p551 quoted from J. Steig, *The Old Testament Made Easy*, NY, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1990.

	Jesus took my...	...and gave me...	Scriptures ²
1	Sins	His righteousness	He made Him who knew no sin <u>to be sin</u> on our behalf, so that <u>we might become the righteousness</u> of God in Him (2 Cor 5:21).
Jesus removed my sinfulness and now I put on Christ's robe of righteousness.			
2	Rebellion, Independence	Restored fellowship	All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to <u>his own way</u> ; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him (Isa 53:6). <u>They may be one</u> , just as We are one (Jn 17:22).
Jesus has taken my rebellion and independence and I have restored daily fellowship with God.			
3	Heart's Iniquities	A new heart and a new spirit	He was crushed for our <u>iniquities</u> (Isa 53:5); A <u>new heart</u> and a <u>new spirit</u> I give you (Ezek 36:26).
Jesus removed my darkened heart and I have received a new heart, alight with God's desires.			
4	Defeat by the power of sin	Power to live righteously	He Himself bore our sins in His body <u>on the cross</u> , so that <u>we might die to sin</u> and <u>live to righteousness</u> (1 Pet 2:24).
Jesus removed the power of sin and now I have the power and passion to live in holiness.			
5	Shame	God's glory	Endured the cross, despising the <u>shame</u> (Heb 12:2). The <u>glory</u> which You have given Me I have <u>given to them</u> (Jn 17:22).
Jesus has taken my shame and now I radiate His glory.			
6	Curse	God's blessing, the Holy Spirit	Christ redeemed us from the <u>curse of the Law</u> ... in order that in Christ Jesus the <u>blessing of Abraham</u> might come to the Gentiles, so we <u>receive the promise of the Spirit through faith</u> (Gal 3:13-14).
Jesus removed the curse. I walk by the Spirit, experiencing God's blessings.			
7	Sickness	Healing	By His <u>wounds</u> you were <u>healed</u> (1 Pet 2:24).
Jesus has taken my sickness and I live in divine health.			
8	Poverty	His riches	Though He was rich, yet for your sake He <u>became poor</u> , so that you through His poverty might <u>become rich</u> . (2 Cor 8:9 – see vss. 1-15 for context).
Note that Paul defines riches as having enough for ones needs and enough to give away to others. "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." 2 Cor 9:8			

² This listing of the Exchange of the Cross comes from Mark Virkler. <https://www.cwgministries.org/blogs/power-cross-where-divine-exchange-took-place>

	Jesus has taken my poverty and I now live in abundance.		
9	Sorrows, Regrets	Hope	Our <u>sorrows</u> He carried (Isa 53:4); Christ in you, the <u>hope</u> of glory (Col 1:27).
	Jesus has taken my sorrow and regret of what could have been; now hope fills my heart daily.		
10	Anxiety	Joy, peace	<u>Rejoice</u> in the Lord... Be <u>anxious</u> for nothing... and the <u>peace</u> of God will guard your heart... (Phil 4:4-7).
	Jesus has taken my anxiety. Now joy and peace guard my heart.		
11	Rejection, Fear	Adoption as a son of God	"My God, my God, why have You <u>forsaken</u> me?" (Matt 27:46). He predestined us to <u>adoption</u> as <u>sons</u> through Jesus Christ to Himself (Eph 1:5)
	Jesus has removed my fear of rejection and adopted me into His family.		
12	Death	Eternal life	The wages of sin is <u>death</u> ; the gift of God is <u>eternal life</u> through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 6:23).
	Jesus experienced my death and I now have eternal life.		

That is far too much to absorb in one sitting, I suggest it is worth meditating on them. There are plenty of printed copies of the sermon at the welcome table and it is on the church website as well.

How do this connect with the Romans 8 passage and the Parable of the Sower?

The Romans 8 passage enlarges on the victory Christ has won for us to set us free from sin. Because of what he has done, there is no condemnation. Our sins are covered by his shed blood. When God looks at us, he sees the righteousness of Christ. We are not condemned. If you are feeling condemned at any time, confess your sin to God, ask his forgiveness and take assurance from 1 John 1:9:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Then trust that God has done what he promised --- forgiven you and cleansed you.

Paul notes in Romans 8:5ff, that there is a battle occurring within us between the desires of our old nature and the leading of the Spirit of God within us.

God has worked a great salvation for us in Christ on the Cross as we have seen. Will we press in to know him and all he has for us? Will we value our inheritance and apply it to our lives or let it slip away – ignored, neglected, counted of little worth, even despised as Esau did his inheritance?

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus taught about his word being received differently by different people. It is the same good seed being sown, but the ground on which it falls makes all the difference for what harvest there is.

We often apply this only to evangelism, but I think it is reasonable to apply it to whatever message comes to us from God. Will we receive the good word he conveys to us or let it be snatched away by the birds, or choked out by other things in our lives, or be so poorly rooted that it fails to thrive?

Let us not despise so great a salvation put press in to know him and work our salvation out into our lives in deep respect for God Almighty.

The Cross was enough!

We can summarise the exchange of the cross in these two statements.

- **Jesus removed my:** sins, rebellion, evil heart desires, enslavement to sin, shame, curse, sickness, poverty, sorrow, anxiety, fear of rejection, and death.
- **Jesus has given me:** His righteousness, restored fellowship, new heart desires, power over sin, His glory, the Holy Spirit, health, prosperity, hope, joy, peace, adoption into His family and eternal life.

I am complete in Christ. (Col. 1:28) Amen.