

June 11th Readings

GENESIS 24:52-26:16

MATTHEW 8:18-34

PSALM 10:1-15

PROVERBS 3:7-8

Esau's decision to trade his birthright for a single meal of red stew is one of the worst deals ever recorded in the Bible. In the Mosaic law the firstborn son inherited a double portion and was the judicial authority. This was probably true during the patriarchal age as well. During the patriarchal age the one with the birthright also served as family priest.

Not only did Esau lose these rights and privileges but the worst part of the deal was that God was very displeased with Esau. In Hebrews 12:16 God calls him "godless" and the passage in Genesis says that Esau despised his birthright. However, Esau is not the only one who looks bad in this story. Jacob takes advantage of his brother's weakness and later deceives his own father. Why were the actions and decisions of Esau condemned and those of Jacob, the deceiver, not? It is reasonable to assume that the sin that Esau committed was much worse than Jacob's sin. Esau treated a gift of God with contempt. It was an indication of his short-sightedness and his carnal appetite. He traded something of great value for something common. The birthright was also associated with the promises of God. So Esau showed not only a lack of appreciation but a lack of faith.

If we apply this story to ourselves today, what are we trading for our birthright? Our birthright is eternal life in the kingdom with Jesus and a crown of righteousness. I Corinthians 6:9-10 gives a list of sins that will keep us from inheriting this. If we practice these things we trade our birthright for a few moments of pleasure; something holy and enduring for something carnal and temporary. The passage in Hebrews tells us if we are sexually immoral we are like Esau "who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son". Our culture trivializes and even mocks sexual purity. Young people are ostracized for their virginity and are encouraged to "lose" it as soon as possible. But what they are losing is something of great value. God through the writers of Genesis, I Corinthians, and Hebrews is encouraging us to value and protect our birthright of purity and to certainly not trade it for worldly pleasures. To do so would be as foolish as trading heaven for a bowl of stew.

June 12th Readings

GENESIS 26:17-27:46

MATTHEW 9:1-17

PSALM 10:16-18

PROVERBS 3:9-10

In this Genesis passage we see Jacob conspiring with his mother against his brother and deceiving and lying to his father to steal Esau's blessing. This is the second time he has taken advantage of his brother and at this point in his life he hardly looks like a man that God can use to send His blessings on all men. Yet God chose him over Esau. I don't believe I would have. Esau was after all the firstborn. He is a man of the open country and somewhat impetuous. So he seems to resemble Peter, the apostle, at least superficially, who turned

out to be a leader of the church. Isaac, his father and a godly man, loved Esau more than Jacob. Also, Esau was the deceived not the deceiver. So why was Jacob chosen over Esau?

Possibly, because Jacob demonstrated faith while Esau did not. Even though Jacob's methods were flawed and at times underhanded he still demonstrated faith. He demonstrated that he believed the promises that God had made to his grandfather Abraham and to his father Isaac. Perhaps God was looking for that mustard seed of faith that He talks about in Matthew 17:20. Despite Jacob's character flaws God transforms Jacob into Israel the father of the twelve tribes and changes this man of deception into a man of faith. "By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff." Hebrews 11:21

June 13th Readings

GENESIS 28:1-29:35

MATTHEW 9:18-38

PSALM 11:1-7

PROVERBS 3:11-12

This passage in Matthew of the woman with a bleeding disorder has always piqued my curiosity. First of all there is the display of God's power. The woman sneaks up behind Jesus and touches the edge of his cloak and is immediately healed. This extraordinary healing indicates the extent of God's power in that it is not a direct physical contact and the healing did not even require Jesus' attention.

Secondly, there is such a contrast in the parties involved. There is a prominent man (Jairus the synagogue ruler) who openly approaches Jesus versus a destitute woman who secretly approaches Jesus from behind. There is also a public figure (Jesus) with the power to heal vs. a woman in need who wanted to go unnoticed (Luke 8:47).

Thirdly, this miracle occurs as an interruption of another miracle: Raising Jairus' daughter from the dead. At this time in Jesus' ministry he is a busy man, so much so that he has to retire to remote places to get a moment to himself. So it would be understandable if Jesus ignored this woman. When she secretly touches him he is talking with someone more important than her, a synagogue ruler, and he is about to do a miracle more extraordinary than hers. Yet, he allows himself to be interrupted and even searches for the woman who touched him.

Lastly, in other parallel passages we see Jesus wait for her to acknowledge that it was she who had touched him. With the power to heal and to know men's hearts surely Jesus could know who had touched him but he waits for her to reply. Perhaps it was just as important for this woman to be noticed by Jesus as it was to be healed. Jesus took his attention off the synagogue ruler, the crowd, and even his own disciples and for a moment directed it toward her.

It is comforting to know that Jesus not only wants to heal us but wants to know each one of us. He is never too busy and our troubles are never too small. Even this timid approach showed faith and Jesus encouraged her to "take heart". Perhaps after that day she was no longer the woman with the bleeding disorder but the woman Jesus noticed.

June 14th Readings

GENESIS 30:1-31:16

MATTHEW 10:1-23

PSALM 12:1-8

PROVERBS 3:13-15

Since the time that Jacob had received the birthright and the blessing of Isaac his life seems to have taken a diversion from the blessings promised to Abraham. While fleeing from his brother he has moved away from the promised land and ironically has become entrapped in his father-in-law's schemes. He has been tricked into marrying a woman he did not love and is essentially an indentured servant. In his mind his father-in-law has cheated him by changing his wages ten times. But through God's providence Jacob has become rich and Leah, the wife due to Laban's trickery, has born him many sons. More importantly she has born him Judah who will become the preeminent tribe of Israel and the tribe through which the Messiah will be born.

It is important to realize that in our own lives we may have to endure circumstances that seem like diversions but ultimately may be a fulfillment of God's promises.

June 15th Readings

GENESIS 31:17-32:12

MATTHEW 10:24-11:6

PSALM 13:1-6

PROVERBS 3:16-18

As Jesus sends out the twelve, it is interesting that he says, "I did not come to bring peace but a sword." This is somewhat surprising considering that the heavenly host who announced the birth of Jesus in Luke 2 proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." We also know that Jesus "brought peace through his blood, shed on the cross." Colossians 1:20. These ideas are not contradictory since they were directed to different parties under different circumstances. The peace that Jesus brought was to those that accepted the message. It reconciled God to man and brought the Jews and the Gentiles together by breaking down the dividing wall of hostility. When Jesus said he came to bring a sword he was describing the reaction of the unbelieving world to his message. As a sword cuts and divides, Jesus knew his message would divide the righteous from the unrighteous and would even divide family bonds.

June 16th Readings

GENESIS 32:13-34:31

MATTHEW 11:7-30

PSALM 14:1-7

PROVERBS 3:19-20

As Jacob prepares to meet his brother he sends all of his possessions and family across the ford of the Jabbok but he spends the night alone on the other side. He wrestles with a “man” until daybreak and refuses to let him go until he blesses him. The story is curious for a number of reasons. Why is Jacob not with his family? Why does Jacob seek another blessing? After all, he already had the birthright, Isaac’s blessing, and the reaffirmation of God’s promise at Bethel.

But perhaps the biggest question is why does God allow Jacob this bragging right? The “man” in the story is not able to overpower Jacob, agrees to Jacob’s demand to bless him, and renames him Israel “because you have struggled with God and men and have overcome.” We know in a later story one angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrians. So if this “man” is an angel of God why does he not overpower Jacob? Why doesn’t God remind Jacob of His sovereignty and humble him?

Perhaps the answers lie in God’s desire for man to pursue Him. Although Jacob is once again trying to manipulate God and demanding a blessing he also shows His belief in God and desires the blessing so much that he wrestles all night to get it. He is persistent and maybe this is his reward.

We know that Jesus gives two parables on the importance of persistence in prayer. He says, “Ask and it will be given you. Seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” It seems that it was more important at this time to reward Jacob for his desire and persistence than to teach him humility and to wait upon the Lord.

It is encouraging to realize that God is patient with us and knows when to encourage us and when to rebuke. He sees the desire of our heart even though our pursuit of him may be imperfect.

June 17th Readings

GENESIS 35:1-36:43

MATTHEW 12:1-21

PSALM 15:1-5

PROVERBS 3:21-26

In the Genesis passage God directs Jacob to return to Bethel where he saw the stairway to heaven and God renewed to Jacob the promises that he made to Abraham. Once Jacob returns, God appears to him again and reaffirms the promises. Although the place and the promises are the same the circumstances are different. In his first trip to Bethel he is alone and a man on the run. Now he is returning in honor with all of his family and with all of his livestock possessions. It’s as if God is reminding Jacob of his humble beginnings and that he keeps his promises. Maybe God is telling all of us to reflect on our poverty without him and to remember the many times he has lifted us up out of our distress. Sometimes it is important to revisit those places and those moments where God has touched our lives.