

ESAU'S CHOICE.

By

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"Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person as Esau, who for a single meal sold his birthright. For ye know that even when afterwards he wished to obtain the blessing, he was rejected : for he found no room for repentance, though he sought it out carefully with tears." (Hebrews 12: 16- 17).

How marvelously has the wisdom of God adapted the deeds of old, to minister lessons to us of this so different dispensation! How does the past, seen from a right point of view, leap into light, like a mountain peak at the ray of the morning sun!

The favor of the ungodly generally sets in toward Esau. To their eye, he is a plain, blunt, honest man; and Jacob a crafty hypocrite. There is a deep reason for that, in God's choice of Jacob, and rejection of Esau.

The enmity of the heart secretly rises against God. Was Jacob so bad a character? Then God's choice was not determined by Jacob's goodness, but sprang out of his grace. We have no need to defend Jacob in his acts of sin.

But Esau's character, weighed without prejudice, shows him to be a very evil man. His profaneness is here set forth; a sin justly offensive to God. His polygamy, designed to affect his parents, was surely evil enough. His murderous feelings cherished against his brother, after his own misconduct had parted with his birthright, should weigh heavily the balance against him. An honest man would have consented to the loss of his birthright. 'I sold the bed from under me; I must own that it is my own fault, if I sleep on the bare floor!'

The Holy Spirit has hung this offender in chains by the roadside as a warning. May we solemnly, at the foot of his gibbet, consider!

1. ESAU'S SIN, AND -
2. HIS PUNISHMENT.

1. ESAU'S SIN

Profaneness is a sin against God, the neglecting, violating, or despising of sacred things. In its worst form, it becomes scoffing, the jesting with, and ridiculing the words of God, his ordinances, and people.

The opportunity to display this sin was afforded by Esau's birth. God made him the firstborn. Spiritual privileges, not easily defined, were attached to the birthright. They probably consisted of -

(a) The blessing to be bestowed by his inspired father.

(b) The glory of having Messiah spring from him, and of being the Great Patriarch of God's people Israel.

(c) Had he been holy, God's name had been connected with his. Jehovah's title had been "God of Esau," as now we read "God of Israel," and the "God of Jacob."

The history of the profane act is fully given. When hungry, unsuccessful, faint, away from home, he sold his birthright, bartering spiritual things for temporal. His unbelief said, 'My life is near a close. Food will save me.' Bread then is his God! He trusts the red pottage. He has no faith in Jehovah!

Notice the aggravations of the sin.

1. He sells the birthright for so small a price. Little enough were it, had he claimed to be supported all his life by Jacob. But "a single meal!" He would hardly have parted with one of his arrows for that.

2. He himself depreciates the article he sells. This discovers his light thoughts. Was ever a man leading a glossy, fleet, beautiful Arabian charger heard to say, to one who proposed to purchase - "Well, I don't think I shall want to ride her anymore; so of what use is this hack to me?" So does Esau, however! His light estimate of the spiritual and eternal is written on the surface. He must often have despised it in his heart, ere the contempt appeared in his words. His excuse is weak. Was he at the point of death? Better death with God's smile, than life under his frown! But he was not at death's door while he held the birthright. If Messiah was to spring from him, and as yet he had no son, the birthright had kept him alive till then. But now he robs himself of his only guarantee for life prolonged. He provokes the Most High to cut him off.

3. He sells with an oath. 'Tis probable, that Esau's word was not trustworthy.' Lest he should repent, Jacob will revert his determination by an oath. Even at this demand he halts not. That which would have induced thought in many, does not make him hesitate. God is called in as a witness of this evil deed; He is entreated to avenge the transgression, if Esau would undo it, and would take back the birthright thus made over to Jacob.

4. He eats and drinks away the produce of his crime at a sitting! He considers that he has had his value received and is content. After-reflections do not rouse him to a sense of his sin. "He went his way," and forgot it, as if nothing more remarkable had taken place, than the worldly barter of a hare for a measure of wheat.

But notice next -

2. HIS PUNISHMENT

How long a period intervened, ere Isaac's intention of giving the blessing was expressed, we know not. The birthright was connected with the paternal blessing, and the loss of the one entailed loss of the other. The two are connected by Esau:

"And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times; he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?" Gen. 27: 36.

The blessing transmitted was that of Abraham; (Gen. 28: 4) and it carried with it advantages of temporal value, as well as of eternal.

Now, just at the time that these are to be granted, Esau wakes up to a sense of their importance. He wishes to receive the blessing.

His father probably was not sensible of Esau's forfeiture of it. Esau himself has forgotten, that it is his no longer. But God has not forgotten. And, - "HE WAS REJECTED."

The superior blessing was refused him.* (See note 1) Refused by his father! Refused to a favorite son! And by that father's sudden change of mind, after his full intention of granting it had been expressed! Nay, after Isaac was aware that a deceit had been palmed off on him by the son he blessed? No curse on Jacob! Nor shall Esau gain the blessing sought! "Yea, and he shall be blessed!" Mournful words to Esau's ear! "Cursed is he that curseth thee" - the words used by Isaac - shut the door against his launching malediction at Jacob, even had he been so disposed.

We have next presented to us the -

Reason for his Rejection.

"He found no room for repentance." To whose repentance do the words refer?

1. To Esau's? Or,

2. To his father's? We may view it advantageously from both points.

1. From Esau's side. But here a difficulty arises, 'May not one repent always? As long as a man is living, is there not always room for it? And did not Esau repent?' Yes! Of his folly. Not of his sin towards God.

But the expression is peculiar. It is, "He found no room for repentance." The words seem to mean, that there was no opportunity by repentance to repair his loss. In many cases repentance brings forgiveness, both from God and man; and undoes the mischievous consequences entailed on the sin.

Thus (1) when the Ninevites repented at Jonah's preaching, God's threats were recalled, and the city spared.

The repentant (2) prodigal son was reinstated in his father's house.

Thus, penitent (3) Peter, after his denial, resumed his place among the apostles, obtaining the Savior's forgiveness. But not so here. There was no opportunity afforded to repair the damage inflicted by his sin. His birthright was irrevocably gone, and with it the blessing.

(A). He had received and enjoyed the good things he coveted as the price of the blessing, and of the birthright itself. He could not possess at the same time both the article sold, and the price of its sale. And how poor and fleeting was the price! Indian chiefs sold to the English settlers their hills and woods, dales and rivers, for cloth, and axes, and fishhooks. But these soon wore out, got broken, and were lost! The land abode with its possessors. Even if the Indians had desired and been able to purchase back their land at twenty times the original price, they could not have obtained it.

(B). Again, the birthright was not simply a thing lost, like the prophet's borrowed axe. The article sold had become the property of another, and that possessor was then more fully sensible than ever of the value of the right acquired, and unwilling to part with it. To take it away, were injustice to Jacob.

(C). Esau had sworn it away. There was, therefore, a third party to the contract. And even if Jacob had been willing to sell it back, the mighty Umpire had refused. Esau had invoked God's curses on himself, if he recalled the sale. There was no remedy then. The transfer must stand good. Esau's tears could not repair the loss.

2. But now let us view the matter from Isaac's side. In view of the difficulty which has been noticed, it seems most reasonable to regard the repentance spoken of as referring to the father. Esau could not induce his father to repent. The word had gone out of his lips by inspiration, and it could not be recalled. There was no room, on his father's part, to repent. He had spoken the will of God. God would not alter. The blessing was clothing Jacob already. No human hand could tear it off: not even his hand who had placed it there. Esau's attempt is made to produce change of mind in his father. But he found him immovable. The thing is done. 'The matter is beyond my control' - is his father's virtual plea.

While, then, Esau was sensible of his father's kindly leaning towards him, and assailed his affection with the piercing petition of agonizing sorrow, with "exceeding bitter cry," and with tears, that so

seldom dim the eye of the stern hunter, he could not prevail. Thrice he cries to his father; but thrice the object of his petition is refused. He troubles Isaac's heart, but cannot change him. The highest wave of the earthquake may leap upon the beach, tear up its sands, and shake them fiercely, but tis only for an instant; it must let them fall again, and roll back denuded of them, to its depths.

Let me apply the subject to disciples of the Lord Jesus.

This epistle is addressed to BELIEVERS, who "had fled for refuge" to Jesus; to men who had in early days exhibited great courage and endurance for Christ. The apostle's appeal, then, is not made to hypocrites, or to the worldly.

The Old Testament history, here applied to us, proves the same truth. Esau was Isaac's circumcised son, born in the promised time as truly as Jacob; twin-brother of the same father and mother. Even when rejected and excluded from the chief blessing, he did not go away with a curse. He was still owned as a son. "What shall I do unto thee, my son?" He enjoyed a lower blessing, though still shut out from the higher. Be assured, then, that if like Esau you sin, like him will you be punished! Consider a moment! How did he lose the blessing?

(1) Not by profaneness. Was a peculiar spiritual blessing entrusted to Esau? So is one to you. Might Esau's blessing be lost by misconduct?* So may yours. We are made by conversion 'Sons of God.' A higher standing is given to us, than that possessed by Esau. Before us is set the glory peculiar to the better covenant; Heb. 4. We are "the first-born." We are the first redeemed to God out of Egypt by the Lamb's blood. Were the first-born of Israel (afterwards exchanged for the Levites) peculiarly saved? Heb. 11: 28. So are we. Before us is set the hope of the highest millennial blessedness. We are by God "called to his kingdom and glory." We may be partners with Messiah in the promised blessing.

But you may think the thousand years of glory a trifle. You may say, 'Let me only obtain eternal life, and I am content!' You may think scorn of the pleasant land, and give small credence to the Lord's word. You may entertain hard thoughts of God, as if he had put you into circumstances too overwhelming for any to contend against. You may, like Israel of old, conjure up insuperable difficulties in this path to glory. How should you, the "grasshopper," face the giant sons of Anak? You may despair, like Esau. 'Tis of no use my trying to obtain the kingdom. In circumstances like mine, none can stand upright! The theory, I own, is beautiful. But 'tis far too strict for any one to carry it out in practice!' If you allow such thoughts, deeds of like quality will speedily follow. As surely as explosion follows the spark's touch of gunpowder, so will temptation bring out such profaneness into act.

You will bargain away your interest in future glory for present worldly advantages. Your hopes of the kingdom being faint, and your ideas of it feeble, you will, like Esau, sell at a price ruinously low; establishing to God's eye, and, at last, to all other's eyes also, your profaneness. It will be like the heir of a dukedom, who has fallen into poverty, and is obliged to live in the thatched cottage, and to gain his living by his axe, selling his interest in the ducal palace, estates, and title, in order to gain a

hundred shillings for present need. Yet 'tis unlike that transaction. For there were no profaneness in that bargain. 'Tis one worldly interest bartered for another. But, in your case, 'tis spiritual exchanged for temporal things.

Thousands of cases of this character are going on around us, seen and noted by God.

1. There is a minister with a conscience not at rest. He would tell you, were you in his confidence, - 'I am troubled at several things I am called to say and do. But what can one in my circumstances do? I have a wife and a growing family, needing all I can give them. If I throw myself out of my present sphere, how are they to be supported? This is just Esau's spirit of unbelief. "Behold I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birthright do me?" If he holds this ground, the living which he derives from his wounded conscience, is the mess of pottage for which he sells his birthright.

2. Here is a believing servant. She has some time out of place, and her funds are exhausted. A situation of large wages in a nobleman's family opens itself. All seems arranged with the mistress. "Of what religious persuasion are you?" she enquires. "A dissenter!" "O! I cannot take you then. You would suit me very well in every other respect. But if you enter my service, you must go nowhere but to church. I am so pleased with what I have seen of you, that I will give you a day or two to think about it. An ungodly clergyman preaches there morality, not Christ's Gospel. But the world glitters, and God's golden promises fade into tinsel. The world's false tinsel gleams like gold. Have you never seen at a fair-stall, pictures of an actor all glitter and glare, red, yellow, purple, blue, and gilding? The child is caught by them. The father knows their worth. A penny, or two-pence! But that quiet picture by Rubens, with such depth of shade, and glow of light; that which the child passes by with little regard, draws the father's eye; 'tis worth thousands!

How now is the strife in the believing servant's bosom settled? Though she has been immersed as a believer, and enrolled as a member of a Church of Christ, she yields, she gives up spiritual privileges, membership, and hopes, for present temporal openings. She has her reward now.

Is not this Esau's choice anew? Is not this a case of the same kind of principle? Yes! the higher station, the greater wages, are the mess of pottage. The sale is as real as Esau's. Both cannot be enjoyed together. The superior is sacrificed. The worldly benefit may be gained; but the kingdom is lost!

3. Here is a Christian tradesman, a bookseller. He finds competition closing round him. His gains are small. His opponents in the same trade are outstripping him. They are not troubled with his scruples: they can take advantage in business which Christ condemns. But he has a wife and increasing family. He does not "like to sell novels, and plays, and cards. But how is he to obtain a livelihood if he does not? Others will do it, if he does not. These are days of peculiar difficulty. He must do as others of his trade, or quit the field." If he does, here is Esau's profane bargain over again. The greater amount of worldly gain which he wins by compliance with custom, is his mess of pottage. Like that, 'tis swiftly passing away. The earthly good is enjoyed, till death comes, or the Lord appears. Then, the last farthing is paid. He, in his lifetime, has enjoyed his goods.

But there is a day to come, which will enact over again the scene between Esau and his father.

The trump has sounded resurrection! The saints are gathered to meet Christ and his Father. In that blaze of dazzling light, before the awful presence of Jesus, a sense of the vast moment of the kingdom flashes into instant light. What is the world then, beside a place in the glory of Messiah? Night has ceased to brood over the field of view. The traveler who lay down to rest at night on the mountain brow, and had but dim imperfect glimpses of the scenery below, by a crescent moon, wakes to find a broad, sublime landscape, leaf-clad in all the glow of summer, glittering in the diamond dews of morn, vocal with choirs of nightingales, girt with forests, grand with mountains, silvered by cataract and river. How unlike its grandeur to his feeble fancies of the evening! The sun has brought out all its concealed beauty and majesty, and he stands in rapture.

Even so at a glance will the soul of the disciple realize the value of the kingdom then! The desire to possess a place in it rises like a blaze in a heap of dry piled furze. The low thoughts of the past are vanishes, like the wreath of steam from the railway engine. The previous quiet surrender of it as a hopeless thing, is all forgotten. Vividly does the soul feel; earnestly pant for it.

Then springs to the lip the earnest appeal.

'O Lord, give me to partake thy glory! to enter thy kingdom.'

Then will the Savior recall to the memory of the guilty the profane bargain of earth. The glory then beaming was surrendered, to obtain the pelf of earth. That good has been enjoyed. The bargain has been held to all the life long. The birthright has been sold. The blessing gone! The choice between the two was deliberately made, and firmly sustained. The kingdom is lost!

But the soul cannot tamely give up so great a good. A sense of the awfulness of losing so great a glory, and being shut out from other's joys and Messiah's reign for a thousand years, shakes the soul. 'I in darkness, my brethren in light! I left in sorrow, they bathing in joy, a thousand years!'

An exceeding bitter cry appeals to the Father in heaven! Tears flow, and the utterance is half choked. 'Oh! admit me! Lord, I sinned! But admit me still! Shut me not out in darkness, while thou reignest in light!'

'Tis vain! The time of repentance is past. That is now. The time of sowing is over, then. 'Tis the hour of recompense according to works. A firmer than Isaac decides. Did the patriarch refuse to a favorite son, in spite of the yearning of nature? God is then showing his righteousness; and his truth may catch no stain. His oath to exclude such from entering his rest, is in full force: Heb. 3. & 4. Spite a love stronger than Isaac's, there is no moving Him. The bargain shall hold. 'Down, profane Esau! the kingdom is lost!'

Let us fear therefore - lest we should be "castaways" from the glory to be revealed. Have we made Esau's profane bargain? Let us break it off at once. THERE IS ROOM FOR REPENTANCE NOW. Not then!

2. I must say a word now to unbelievers.

Do I address a young man of ability and amiableness, the leader of his circle, who has sought the laughter and applause of his ungodly companions, by scoffing parodies of Scripture? Have you, young man, turned the words of God into a jest? And, though conscience was wounded, and called on you loudly to cease from so provoking God, did you still persist? 'Tis perilous to play with God's edged tools. He who in sport balances God's keen sword on his finger-end, must be an adroit juggler indeed, if he does not wound himself. Beware, scoffer! it has dealt mortal gashes, to many a merry blasphemer! Beware, O profane man! What if God's patience suddenly cease! Then, in one moment you would be gasping your last; with terrible shriek your soul would take flight from the awe-stricken assembly of the wicked! Damnation jested at a distance, is one thing! Hell fire inhabited for ever is another!

I beseech you, cease to mock, "lest," as the prophet says, "your bands are made strong." Lest you be given over to Satan a prisoner, in chains never to be loosed. 'Tis frantic madness for a mortal to mock God. He has all eternity to despise your tears, to mock your groans.

And in his justice he has threatened it to the impenitent. "I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh." You are worse than Esau. You have more light, yet you sin more. He did not ridicule religion. He only undervalued God's gift. Is Esau lost? How should you, the more guilty escape?

I turn to another case. You are quietly profane. You love the world well: you are a man after its own heart. You have money enough, and are esteemed a jolly companion. Your creed is, that life was given us to be enjoyed. You despise the silly Jacobs, who will not run with you, nor seek their good things now.

You mean to repent, however, at the last. You mean to enjoy the world as long as you may, and just when the leaky brig is pitching head foremost, and plunging with a whirlpool to the bottom, you will leap on board the life-boat just alongside. But - "Time enough yet, to go on with the world! On, rowers! pull down the glassy, violet-fringed stream! We will moor the bank, ere it shoots the precipice of waters!"

You mean to repent at some future day. Have you inquired whether God means to give it you? Else you may be cut off in bloom of your sins, a spectacle of woe, a trophy of just vengeance for ever! The forbearance of God may chance to last fewer years than you reckon on. And if it be so, - "IF YE WILL HEAR HIS VOICE, HARDEN NOT YOUR HEART." Repent to-day, and he will forgive. "Our God will abundantly pardon."

But he has never promised to give you years for future repentance. Your notes of hand and promises to pay in future, he esteems waste paper, the guarantee of a fraudulent bankrupt.

Give deeds now! Not promises! Depositor! you are overdrawing your account. Gambler for eternity, stay the dice box! Stake not eternity on a throw! Have you ever heard, what thousands untold, reckless ones such as you, have endured? and are enduring? "set forth as examples, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire"?

Has no death-bed ever been heard of by you? (or beheld, perhaps?) leaving its ghastly scene darkly photographed on the memory of the survivors? Have you never read of one laying himself down to sleep, in spite of the neighbors' ringing, and knocking, and alarms of "Fire! Fire!" and waking up to escape, just as the flames encircled his bed, while the awful cry burst forth from the lips of despair - 'Too late! Too late! Oh that I had listened! But the time is past!

A circumstance I lately read may perhaps impress the warning of to-day on your heart.

One Sunday evening, at the Young Men's Prayer meeting in Philadelphia, (America,) a stranger rose, and begged permission to speak, announcing himself as captain of a vessel now in port, and a professor of the religion of Christ. "I wish," said he, "to warn the impenitent here, that delays are dangerous. It is not safe to put off till to-morrow, what ought to be done this day. It was my lot when sailing, to fall in with that ill-fated steamer, the 'Central America.' The night was closing in, the sea rolling high, but I hailed the crippled steamer, and asked if they needed help. 'I am in a sinking condition,' cried Captain Herndon. 'Had you not better send your passengers on board?' 'Lie by me till morning,' again said Captain Herndon. I made the effort to lie by him, but at night, with such sea rolling, no vessel could control its position, and I never saw the steamer more! In one hour and a half after the captain said 'Lie by me till morning,' the vessel, with its living freight, went down: and he himself, with a great majority of his passengers and crew, were confined in the deep!"

So much for procrastination! But for this delay, the entire crew and passengers of the "Central America" might have been saved!

Has not this a voice to you? The Spirit of God strives now with your hearts, presses, urges you to flee for refuge to the Son of God! You are crippled, ready to sink. And would you say to the Spirit of Grace, - "Not yet! lie by me till morning!" "A more convenient season will come!" If you do, I warn you that the world's tempestuous sea will roll you farther and farther away from God: and it may be that this is the last call God shall permit to be given you. Refuse this, and you may sink, victim of your own folly, "lost for evermore!"