



A Birthright, or an Empty Soup Bowl?

By Stephen Mast

Many, many years ago in ancient times there lived a man, a rather hairy man, so hairy that his arms were not unlike the back of a young goat. This man lived in a place called Canaan. He was an excellent and skilled hunter, and undoubtedly was the terror of all the wild game in that area.

One day we find him coming in from the field, probably from yet another hunt. He is coming in, and most surely he has had a very hard day, for he is faint. I could imagine that maybe his knees even feel like buckling. He's hungry ... very hungry! As he approaches his home, which is a tent where he lives with his father, mother, and twin brother, the smell of thick vegetable soup¹ greets him. Being famished, the desire to have some of this soup becomes powerfully strong. What more could a hungry man wish for? Prepared to fill his empty stomach, he hunts down the source of the aroma.

Now this man, as the oldest son of his father, has the birthright. The owner of the soup is none other than his younger twin brother. This is where the problem comes in.

When he approaches his brother about giving him some of the soup, brother says, "Sell me this day thy birthright." At this time his birthright seems very insignificant, as it is something he is to receive in the future. And right now, at this moment, he feels like he is about ready to die, so he goes ahead and sells his birthright for a meal. He even confirms the deal by an oath. After he has eaten the food, he is left with an empty soup bowl instead of a birthright. In a few hours his hunger will return and he must look for more food.

¹ Thompson Chain Reference Study Bible gives the definition of "pottage" as "a thick vegetable soup."

I am sure by now you have guessed that this is none other than the infamous Esau. This account appears in Genesis 25, and it ends by saying, "Thus Esau despised his birthright." Other Scriptures don't deal with Esau any more kindly. Hebrews 12:16 calls him a "profane person."²

Why was it such a great offense to sell his birthright? After all, was it not his to do with as he wanted? First of all, I believe we need to consider what this birthright really was.³ It was the right to a double portion of his father's goods, yet much more than this, it was the right to the covenant that God had made with his grandfather Abraham in Genesis 12, "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." The birthright which Esau despised and sold contained this promise, which we can see by the fact that it was Jacob's descendants who were the chosen people of God, in whom all nations were blessed. So by following the line of least resistance, the cravings of his stomach, Esau forsook this great eternal inheritance—this unique relationship with God—and was left with an empty soup bowl. How foolish!

Dear reader, if you have been born again, you also have a birthright. By faith in the Son of God you have "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." 1 Peter 1:4 This inheritance is so rich, so bountiful, so wonderful, so incomprehensible, we cannot even fathom all that it contains. Words cannot even give us the full picture. It is so vast! God has done so much so that we can have this inheritance. If so be that you have left all and followed Jesus, you have a unique relationship with God that the world can neither have nor understand. How precious!

However, there are no less temptations today than there were in the days of Esau. In fact, it seems they increase with each passing day, as the world we live among gyrates ever faster and faster around self-gratification and

² Webster's Dictionary gives the meaning of "profane" as, "Not concerned with religion or religious matters."

³ *Zondervan Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* has this to say: "That birthright was far more than the material possessions of their father Isaac: it was first and foremost the promise of God, the covenant oath given to Abraham and passed down from generation to generation. In despising his birthright, Esau showed that he was a complete materialist and had no concern at all for the special relationship with God granted under the covenant. Later, Jacob was far from blameless in plotting to have the birthright confirmed to him by his father. But his actions showed that he considered a relationship with God an important thing."

the lusts of the flesh. There is an ever greater variety of tantalizing, mouth-watering soups being cooked today, things that appear so innocent, so good, and look like just what the faint-hearted pilgrim needs. There are air conditioners to control your climate and keep you comfortable and at ease, and the time would fail me to mention all the whirring, purring, sputtering machines that with the flip of a switch or the touch of a button will do your bidding and make your life easier. Or, will they????

What happened to the children of Israel when everything went well and they had an easy life? They forgot God.

Almost every store you enter in this country is full of blinking, beeping gadgets to tantalize you, sales staff to persuade you, and an easy pay plan to help you down the path of least resistance and discontentment. Beware, it's a trap! Most churches today have an easy "gospel" which encourages men to not take these things too seriously. Many are the modern-day Esau who trade their birthright for temporary pleasures and ease of life.

I believe at the moment when Esau sold his birthright, he did not fully comprehend the consequences of his actions. The reality of it hit him much later. Nevertheless, there were plenty of warning signs that should have stopped him before he sold it, had he been alert and not just taking the path of least resistance. Will it be any different for us? When you start down the path of least resistance you may not face immediate consequences, but rest assured, they will come. Your children are watching your example, and will usually go even further down that path than you feel comfortable with. If you want to see the consequences of taking the path of least resistance and doing what is convenient, you need only stop and look at society around you: broken homes, laziness, disobedient children, immorality, far removed from God's order. Society did not come to this overnight; it happened gradually, and it began by taking the path of least resistance.

When you make a decision, what is it based on? Do you truly want God's will at all cost? Do you do God's will whatever it costs? Are your decisions based on God's will, or is it easier to just do the most convenient thing at the moment, and hopefully He will reveal His will tomorrow? Do you plainly declare that you are a pilgrim and a stranger, a peculiar person, seeking a better country, that is an heavenly?

Dear readers, unless we get a heavenly vision and look not at the things that are seen, but the things that cannot be seen and that have eternal value, we will all perish with Esau.

Do you have a birthright, or an empty soup bowl? ~

—Taken from *A Love of the Truth*, Oct. 2011