

## Short-Sighted Esau Genesis 25-27

Friends have you ever found yourself in a crowd, waiting to spot someone famous?  
You set yourself up in a strategic position,  
and then, with eyes peeled, you wait in hope for your brush with fame!

I remember when I was in pre-school  
the Queen came to our suburb to open a local hospital,  
and so our class was bused out to the site  
where we sat down for what seemed to be hours.  
In reality it was probably only about 20 minutes,  
but to a four year old it seemed like we were waiting forever.  
“Cant we go back to the class room? She’s not coming, lets pack up!”  
But then she did arrive  
and I remember seeing her walk right in front of our group  
where two girls were selected to present flowers.  
We had to wait but the moment came.

Waiting to see someone famous is just one example of a common human problem:  
Do we wait or do we quit?  
It’s a problem that we encounter in all sorts of contexts,  
many are much more serious than waiting to spot a celebrity.  
Do we wait for the stock market to continue growing or do we sell?  
Do we wait for the relationship to improve or do we break up?  
There’s an old country and western song, I think it’s by Kenny Rodgers, with  
the line, *You need to know when to hold them, and know when to fold them!*  
The lyrics are about a game of cards,  
knowing when to keep your hand and knowing when to bail out.

And friends it’s a question that people of faith encounter all throughout their lives:  
Do we wait for our eternal inheritance,  
maintaining faith *in* and obedience *to* Jesus,  
or do we take what often feels like the easier path,  
a life where we decide not to wait for the good things that God has in store,  
a life lived with a focus on the here and now.

As the story of the Bible unfolds  
there are many characters who are faced with this choice,  
and so Esau stands as a case study for all those  
who are faced with the choice of waiting or quitting, holding or folding.  
His example is one we must remember,  
because the question will surely come to each one of us;  
do we maintain our trust in God’s path,  
or do we seek a more immediate satisfaction in the things we see around us.

Esau's example comes as the 1<sup>st</sup> stop in a 9 week tour of Genesis chs 25-50.

It's a bit of an epic tale, we'll meet many different people  
and there are many different themes these chapters touch upon,  
but if you want to know what it's all driving at  
then its good idea to take a look at the opening vs of Ch 26,  
the chapter in-between this week's two readings.

Here's the big picture according to ch 26, starting at verse 2

The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. <sup>3</sup> Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. <sup>4</sup> I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed

Genesis 25-50 tells the story of how God was keeping his promises to Abraham.

Back in Genesis 12, God picked Abraham from obscurity  
and promised him three things;  
that he would be the ancestor of a great nation,  
that this nation would have its own land,  
and that this nation would come to be a blessing for the whole world.

And so the OT basically tells the story of how these promises came to be fulfilled.

People often ask "what is the OT all about?",  
but this is it in a nutshell: it's about God fulfilling his promises to Abraham.  
Abraham's descendants would become known as the nation of Israel,  
living in what would become known as the territories of Israel and Judea  
And the blessing for the whole world  
would come through one particular descendant of Abraham, Jesus Christ,  
who would translate these promises into promises for the whole world.

And so Gen 25-50 sees the Nation of Israel taking shape in fulfillment of God's word.

Now I love watching historical dramas and documentaries about history,

a few years ago I watched a drama series called *John Adams*,  
He was a major figure in the American revolution  
and the 2<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States.

One thing I learnt is that the birth of a nation

can be a pretty rough experience for everyone involved.  
At one stage John Adams says to a French diplomat  
"I study war and politics,  
so that my son can study mathematics and commerce,  
so that his son can study painting and music"  
The idea being that the pioneering generations

would have to strap themselves in for a rough ride.

And from what we heard in our first reading,  
 the early years of Israel would be just as tumultuous;  
 it will be a story with some very broken people playing major roles.

One thing we notice in ch 25:21 is yet again, a key woman is having fertility trouble.  
 Like Sarah, her mother-in-law, and like her daughters-in-law who will follow,  
 We read that Rebekah is having trouble conceiving.  
 It's hard to build a nation  
 when the first three generations of women can't fall pregnant.

And then, when prayers are answered and after conception does occur,  
 the pregnancy is not a smooth one, v22 The babies jostled each other within her,  
 and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. <sup>23</sup> The LORD  
 said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be  
 separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

Right from the beginning we have a family  
 that will be at war with one another,  
 with some key members acting in some appalling ways.  
 The signs of what is to come continue through the pregnancy to the birth,  
 Verse 24 When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb.  
<sup>25</sup> The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named  
 him Esau. <sup>26</sup> After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was  
 named Jacob.

If you take a look at the footnotes there in our Bibles  
 you'll see that these are significant names: *Esau* means *hairy*,  
 while *Jacob* means *he grasps the heel*,  
 which in the Hebrew language was a way of calling someone a liar,  
 —"to grasp the heel" was to tell a lie to someone—  
 and as the story progresses we'll see that Jacob does indeed  
 make lying an impressive art form;  
 It's pretty scandalous the type of deception that Jacob carries out.

And then we also hear that as parents, Isaac and Rebekah don't do a lot to help, v27  
 The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob  
 was content to stay at home among the tents. <sup>28</sup> Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved  
 Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Favoritism within the family is a terrible cancer,  
 it does nothing to help children develop into stable and functional adults,  
 and so this is the environment that would nurture these two growing boys.  
 Favouritism, deception, competition.

But there is another factor that's at play early on in this family saga,  
 and that would be the *grace of God*.  
 One of the regular themes in the Bible

is the mercy and favor shown by God towards imperfect people, and the family of Isaac are in no way excluded from this grace.

The signs of God's grace are found right alongside the brokenness.

The prayers of Isaac over Rebekah's infertility are answered, in fact the infertility itself serves as an important reminder that if any of these promises are going to be fulfilled then it's going to be because of God's graciousness and mercy, and not because of any human strength or ability. Everything hinges on God, not on us!

And even the tussle within the womb says something about God's grace.

The prophecy that the older will serve the younger in v23, this reminds us that God loves to raise up the weak and overlooked. We'd expect the younger brother to fade into the background, but when God is involved, weak players find themselves with a place.

Many of you would know that I've come back from three weeks away, the first two weeks were spent in the mountains but the final week of the holidays saw me back at work in a different way, attacking our front yard in order to get it ready for some new turf. Part of the job was to level a massive tree stump so we could turf over it. Our neighbor suggested we hire a professional stump grinder to come in with his machine and eat it away. But, because I'm cheap, I spent a whole day attacking it with a mattock, which is a blunt and very cumbersome garden tool. It was slow work and I questioned my sanity but I eventually got the job done.

When it comes to fulfilling his purposes in the world, God chooses to use some pretty blunt instruments. God's people come with many flaws, but he works in us and through us nonetheless, and I find that to be a great comfort. Maybe you're doing your best to love your family and lead them to know God but the results don't look pretty. Maybe you've spoken up about Christ only to have the words come out all wrong, Maybe there are times when you wonder whether you and this Christianity thing are actually a good fit. The answer is that you are a good fit because God is gracious and his plans come about through imperfect people like you and me. We'll see this time and time again throughout this series.

But even though God will use us despite our imperfections, there is also a lesson here to not *give in* to our imperfections, to not give in to our weaknesses and to let our brokenness rule us.

From v29 we have a scene where Esau allows his weakness

to lead him into a disastrous decision.  
 He comes in from the field and sees his brother making some stew.  
 “Ohhhhh I’d like some what you’re cooking brother”.  
 And Jacob, sly devil that he is, senses an opportunity.  
 “Sell me your birthright”. Unbelievably, Esau agrees!  
 Just think for a moment about exactly what Esau has agreed to here and why.  
 He’s given up his inheritance for what? A quick and easy meal.  
 He is so ruled by immediate wants,  
 that he has no capacity to judge what will benefit him in the long term.  
 Presumably he’s got some game with him because he’s come in from the field,  
 he could have cooked that, but no,  
 he’s so impatient that he simply must have what immediately on offer.

The following chapter demonstrates just what it is that Esau has exchanged.

We’re told in ch 26 of Isaac’s growing wealth, v 12 of that chapter says that Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the LORD blessed him. <sup>13</sup>The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. <sup>14</sup>He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines envied him. None of which was now going to Esau

Ch 27 contains the famous story of Jacob’s deception of his father.

To confirm upon himself the birthright that Esau had sold him,  
 Jacob covers himself with animal hair and puts on one of Esau’s robes  
 so that his blind father will think he’s blessing Esau.  
 With the goat hair and the robe of his brother Jacob will feel like Esau  
 and he will smell like Esau, and the trick works! Isaac blesses Jacob instead.

Our second reading records the scene where Esau finds out.

“My father”, Esau says in verse 31, “please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.” <sup>32</sup>His father Isaac asked him, “Who are you?” “I am your son,” he answered, “your firstborn, Esau.” <sup>33</sup>Isaac trembled violently and said, “Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him—and indeed he will be blessed!” <sup>34</sup>When Esau heard his father’s words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, “Bless me—me too, my father!” <sup>35</sup>But he said, “Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.” And so Esau asks again at the end of v 36 “Haven’t you reserved any blessing for me?” And Isaac answers “what can I possibly do for you, my son?” Esau pleads again, “Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!” Then we’re told that Esau wept aloud.

It’s the cry of a man who, with an overwhelming sense of horror,  
 realizes that all is lost and nothing is retrievable.  
 The red stew that was delicious a few chapters ago is now hardly a memory,  
 and so Esau is left with nothing.

The New Testament picks this story up in Hebrews ch 12.16

See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. <sup>17</sup>Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit

this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

Friends, every believer in the Lord Jesus  
has a wonderful inheritance waiting for them in the age to come.  
But the Bible gives us a warning.  
It is possible to be so overcome by our immediate wants,  
—to be so ruled by impatience— that we place this inheritance at risk.

I don't think that it's a coincidence  
that the writer to the Hebrews mentions sexual immorality  
alongside the story of Esau and his lack of discipline.  
There are countless people who understand Jesus perfectly,  
people who know the path to eternal life,  
who nonetheless feel they cannot live without sex,  
even if the sex they desire comes in a form that God is displeased with.  
And so for a fleeting moment—or for a series of fleeting moments—  
they exchange eternal life for something temporary.

We don't want to end up like Esau,  
pleading with God for some kind of eternal inheritance  
only to discover that there's nothing left for us  
because we've stubbornly insisted on satisfying our sinful desires.  
Like Esau, It's one or the other, we cannot have both.

And so back to our original question.  
As Christian people, when do we hold and when do we fold?  
Esau demonstrates the foolishness of folding.  
Christian people persevere,  
even when it appears that we'd be better off letting go and moving on.

There's a sad story from recent business history that illustrates all this.  
You've heard of Apple computers,  
you may have heard of Steve Jobs, the man behind Apple's success,  
and you may have heard of Steve Wozniak, the cofounder.  
You may not have heard of Ron Wayne, who was the third co-founder.  
Not long into Apple's history he got cold feet and sold his 10% share for \$800.  
He decided to fold.  
These days a 10% share would be worth over 70 billion dollars.  
It's one of the great miscalculations of business history.

It's easy to be critical of Ron Wayne but he didn't have a crystal ball,  
there's no way he could have known how things turned out.  
Our advantage is that we *do* know what he future holds  
and we *do* know that our inheritance is worth persevering for.  
So friends don't give it up like short-sighted Esau!