

“By faith Isaac Blessed Jacob and Esau” Hebrews chapter 11 verse 20

No one comes out of this covered in glory. Jacob and Esau were Abraham's grand sons, the twin sons of Isaac and his wife Rebekah. The story of their struggle with each other begins at their birth. Esau is born first, and Jacob second. Jacob is born grabbing the heel of his brother. God spoke to their mother, Rebekah, when they were born. Each one would be the progenitors of a great nation, and the older would serve the younger.

They were very different. Esau became a hunter, and Jacob more of a home lover. Jacob favoured Esau, because of the wonderful meals he enjoyed from the animals he hunted. Rebekah was closer to Jacob.

On one occasion, Esau came home exhausted, and asked Jacob for some of the stew he was making. Always ready to grab an opportunity, Jacob demanded Esau's birthright in exchange. In his exhaustion and hunger Esau, perhaps not really thinking he was serious, agreed, even swearing to it with an oath. The book of Genesis suggests that this was far more serious than Esau realised at the time. It says he “despised his birthright.”

But the words we say carry weight. This story warns us not to speak too hastily or rashly, because what we say has consequences, and sometimes they are more serious than we know. When the time came, much later, for the twins to receive their father's blessing, Jacob, at Rebekah's instigation, tricked Jacob, who was by that time old and blind, into giving him the blessing meant for Esau.

Nevertheless, in their sibling rivalry they find themselves fulfilling the word of God to Rebekah at their birth. Jacob did go on to become the father of twelve sons, from whom came the twelve tribes of Israel, including the tribe of Judah, from which tribe came Jesus.

There is a truth in this story that, if we are to be true to scripture as God's word, we have to wrestle with. Many might say that it was unjust for Jacob to be blessed with a birthright that should have been Esau's. But Paul points out that God had declared it long before Jacob deceived his brother and took his birthright. Paul tells the Roman Christians that it is not our place to question God's choice. “Who are you,” he says, “a mere man, to talk back to God?”

God's will is carried out in the world through those who are obedient to him and through those who are not. God has no responsibility or duty to explain himself to us. His thoughts and ways are far removed from ours and beyond our ability to comprehend. We are abundantly blessed in what he does reveal in his word, in Christ and by his Spirit. Clearly though, it is far better for us if we are willing instruments of his will in the world.

Jacob came to a point in his life when he met with God for himself. He came away humbled and changed, with a new name; “Israel.” The name means “He contends with God.” It describes those people who get hold of God and wrestle with him until they break through to a blessing. That's the kind of person God can work in and through.

Prayer

*Father, there s so much about you that I can never understand. You are almighty, sovereign and holy, and none of your plans and purposes in my life and in creation can be flouted. I am merely human, and infinitely removed from your glory. Thank you that faith in Jesus brings me close to you, so that I can submit my life willingly to you, so that your name will be glorified in the world through me. In Jesus name, amen.*

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