

34. Contempt for the Covenant God (2007)

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[0 : 00] We're going to read now in the scriptures and you'll find that our reading for this morning is in the book of Genesis, chapter 25. It's the beginning of the Bible. If you have one of our church visitors' Bibles, it's page 20, I think.

We've been back in our studies in this first book of the Bible for a few weeks now. We come to the very last couple of sections of chapter 25, but I'm going to read from verse 19.

Just to give us the context of Jacob and Esau, verse 19 there is the beginning of book 8 of Genesis. You might remember that Genesis is made up of 10 books, each beginning with this, after chapter 1 that is, each beginning with this little saying, these are the generations, or your version might say this is the account of.

It begins with the account, the generations of the heavens and the earth, and then the generations of Adam and so on. And here we are now down to the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son.

And each time it is the story, not of the person mentioned, but of their progeny. So the generations of Isaac take up the next series of chapters in Genesis, all about Jacob, but also about his brother Esau.

[1 : 20] And that's what we're reading about this morning. So verse 19, these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham fathered Isaac, and Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah to be his wife, the daughter of Bethuel, the Aramean of Paranadam, the sister of Laban, the Aramean.

And Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah to be his wife, and Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah to be his wife. And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife because she was born, and the Lord granted his prayer.

And Rebekah, his wife, conceived. The children struggled together within her, and she said, If it's thus, why is this happening to me? So she went to inquire of the Lord.

And the Lord said to her, Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided. The one shall be stronger than the other.

The older shall serve the younger. When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak.

[2 : 25] So they called his name Esau. Sounds a bit like hairy in Hebrew. Afterward, his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel.

So his name was called Jacob. And you'll see the footnote says, that means he takes by the heel. Or then metaphorically, he cheats. Isaac was 60 years old when she bore them.

When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the open field. While Jacob was a quiet man.

That's a very hard word to translate. Seems to be a contrast here to Esau, who's a wild outdoor type. I think perhaps we could say Jacob was a more cultured man, a more civilized man.

Dwelling in tents, that is, not just inside the tents, but among the tents, looking after the flocks. That is, he was a pastoralist. He was a shepherd. So Esau, a man out hunting wild beasts in the field.

[3 : 33] Jacob settled. Pastoralist. A shepherd, if you like. Isaac loved Esau, because he ate of his game.

But Rebecca loved Jacob. Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. And Esau said to Jacob, let me eat some of that red stew, for I'm exhausted.

And therefore his name was called Edom. You'll see the footnote says, Edom sounds very like the Hebrew for red. Obviously it was a habit of his to shout for this stew.

So he was called Esau the Red. Jacob said, sell me your birthright now. Esau said, I'm about to die. Of what use is a birthright to me? Jacob said, swear to me now.

So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

[4 : 46] Amen. May God bless this reading of his word and give us wisdom to apply it and understand it. Well, if you would turn with me to Genesis 25, and we're going to focus on this last little section, this last couple of scenes, verse 27 to the end of the chapter.

It seems to me that what we have here is a message and a very sobering lesson all about what it means to show contempt for the covenant God.

Last week we were looking at the rest of chapter 25, and we saw how these apparently rather random verses, in fact, give us a very clear message, a very coherent message, about the rock-solid constancy of our covenant God, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and our God also.

Even in the place of death, his promise doesn't fail. Even in the place of division, his plan and his purpose isn't forgotten. And despite our many agonies and perplexities in the life of faith, his pattern is always very reassuringly familiar.

He's teaching us to trust his powerful sufficiency. He's teaching us to bow to his perfect sovereignty. And so we can trust God, and we must trust God.

[6 : 18] What we must never do is distrust him and despise him. Because not only is he a good and a loving and a merciful God, he is also, of course, a holy God.

He's a God that cannot be treated with contempt. And that is, I think, the clear warning of these last verses in this chapter. Don't treat God's promises with contempt.

If you do, you may forfeit the privileges that are afforded to you through God's redeeming purpose. Look at verse 3, you see.

We saw it last week. It speaks so clearly, doesn't it, of God's sovereign grace that humbles us and humbles everyone. God has mercy upon whom he has mercy, says Paul in Romans 9.

Jacob was not chosen because of his works, but because of God's call before even his birth. God works his salvation his way.

[7 : 21] And we must submit to that sovereignty. God is God. But does this family here in chapter 25 learn that?

It's one of the very hardest things to learn and to submit to, isn't it? It's one of the reasons that Paul wrote his great letter to the Romans, to teach all the Christian people there that they must submit to God's sovereign grace.

God saves and he does it God's way. Because, you see, by nature we are proud. We don't want to be humble. We don't want to humble ourselves and to submit to God doing something his way and not our way.

We don't want to submit to the way of righteousness that God provides. The way that allows us no pride, no self-righteousness, no feeling that we have done anything.

But that has to leave absolutely everything to an empty-handed receiving of mercy from somebody else, from God. It's not just the family of Israel, but in fact, it's really of every single human heart that Paul speaks in Romans 10, verse 3, where he says, Being ignorant of the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

[8 : 43] Human beings hate to be humbled, don't you? I do. And so often we refuse to submit to God's righteousness, to God's way of salvation, to God's marvelous grace and mercy that can come only God's way, through Christ, who alone can win for us what we can never, ever win for ourselves, the acceptance and the fellowship with our creator God that we so desperately need.

And you see, this little section about the birthright here shows us that sadly, even within the fold of the family of faith, God's grace and his promise can be despised and rejected.

And the privileges of that covenant household, having been so scorned, can be forfeited. God is sovereign, yes. But individual human beings are responsible.

And God's privileges can be forfeit. And that's the focus, the solemn focus of these verses this morning. Commentators and preachers on these verses very often seem to focus on Jacob and berate him for his scheming and for his deceit.

But at least in these verses, that is not, in fact, the focus of the text. Certainly there is implicit criticism of Jacob's attitude, as indeed I think there is of Isaac and Rebecca as well.

[10 : 10] But what this story shows is that what God has promised, that the older shall serve the younger, that it will come to pass despite all this family's failings.

God's grace is persistent and it covers a multitude of sins. But it doesn't cover all sin. God's grace cannot and will not overcome the determined refusal of that grace.

If mercy will not be received, mercy cannot be effectual. And eventually, mercy will be withheld. And that's the decisive and the chilling word of this chapter.

The last words of these five words, Esau thus despised his birthright. He showed contempt for the covenant, and therefore he showed contempt for the God of the covenant.

That's what these last verses are focusing on for us. And we see the prophesied division unfolding, and we see a culpable despising being unveiled before us.

[11 : 20] Look first at verses 27 and 28, which shows us this division unfolding. On the surface, these verses seem to show us the unfolding contrast in character between the twins, but in fact, they betray a much deeper reality of a deepening conflict within the covenant, and a conflict with the covenant God himself.

See, verse 27, if you see it, it immediately encapsulates the fulfillment of the prophecy of verse 23, the dividing from the womb of these brothers, these two nations, these two peoples as they're going to be.

And all through childhood and adolescence, that contrast in character seems to be becoming more obvious. Esau, we're told, is an outdoor man, a man of the field. He's a man of the wilds. He's a hunter.

But Jacob, by contrast, is a quiet man. It's a hard word. As I said, it's rather ambiguous. It generally means actually single-minded and upright. But here it seems to be a contrast to Esau's wild and rugged ways.

So perhaps cultured or civilized has been suggested. But his place was among the tents with the flocks and the herds. He was a shepherd. He was a pastoralist. And we'll read more of that in the story later on.

[12 : 35] It's worth noting, by the way, that the Bible has generally negative views of hunters. Back in Genesis 10, you might remember Nimrod, the mighty hunter. Nimrod was the man whose people built that defiant city of Babel, defiant opposition to God.

That this description of Esau would have spiritual overtones that certainly wouldn't be missed on Moses' first readers, the Israelites. And likewise, the fact of Jacob being a pastoralist, a shepherd, is also no accident, I think.

God's true Israel, God's Messiah, the son of Jacob, the seed of Jacob. He will be a shepherd, won't he? Not a hunter. But notice, we're not being told here that somehow Jacob is more worthy of God's blessing than Esau.

In fact, in a sense, what we're being told is quite the opposite. Because in the eyes of the world, Esau, the firstborn, the man of might and strength, is far superior.

That's just like today, isn't it? The adverts on the magazine covers, they're not full of bookish bespectacled types, are they? No, it's macho six-pack types, people with the big biceps.

[13 : 51] It's the hunter like Esau who's fettered by the world, isn't it? The flashy, successful celebrity type. And that's success and value in the world's eyes.

And in the world's eyes, Esau seemed to be exactly that. And it seems, as verse 28 says, also in his father's eyes, Isaac loved Esau. It doesn't mean he didn't love Jacob, but it means he favored Esau. He favored him, we're told, because he ate of his game. Now, this isn't the text here about parenting. Much as people might want to use it as a pretext to moralize about the dangers of favoritism, that's not the main concern of this writer here.

Let's not get fixated on that. Nevertheless, the writer surely is hinting to us, isn't he, at the very least, that not all is well in Isaac's priorities in life.

Bible writers are very honest, aren't they, about the failings of the faithful. Nothing's airbrushed out, and I think we see that here with Isaac. Scholar Bruce Waltke says this, Adam failed in eating, Noah in drinking, and Isaac a gourmand in tasting.

[15 : 06] And what we have here is a little trailer, isn't it, for the embarrassing entrapment that we're going to see in chapter 27, when Isaac is deceived precisely because of his weakness for gourmet venison casserole.

And worse, it may explain quite a bit about why Esau, his favorite son, had learned the priorities that he seemed to have learned in life, had he learned it from his father.

The kind of priorities that could lead him in the end to discarding his birthright simply for the sake of satisfying his own stomach. Once Isaac had been a man of committed and constant prayer.

We saw that last week. Twenty years of prayer committedly in line with God's covenant promise. He never deviated. He never went to concubines. He never went to other carnal temptations.

And yet now, after the decades, it seems, well, it seems like what Jesus called the cares of this world and the deceit of riches had choked and stifled that focused covenant direction of his life.

[16:11] Not uncommon, is it? How many Christian men are as keen on prayer and as keen on gospel outreach when they're 45 or 55 or 65 as they were when they were 25?

Not uncommon, is it? And it seems that Isaac's tastes for these worldly delights gave him a soft spot. For Esau, the son who reflected, it seems, those very same appetites.

But Rebecca, verse 28, loved Jacob. Another contrast. Was Rebecca perhaps the more spiritual of the two?

Was she looking to Jacob because of what God had revealed to them in that oracle in verse 23? I think that probably is what the text is suggesting to us. Although, as we'll see in chapter 27, Rebecca is far from perfect herself.

And at best, like all of us, even her best desires are going to be tinged with sin. But however you construe all of this, what surely is the deeper reality that these verses are portraying is this, the conflict surrounding God's covenant promise, even within this covenant family.

[17:27] We just don't get the impression, do we, about this family, that it is a family united in devotion to God's promise. Devoted, above everything else, to his plan.

And how God has said that it must unfold, and it will unfold. Isaac seems to be rather resistant to the idea that Esau, his favorite, should be supplanted by Jacob.

Instead of helping Esau to see that he, like all of the family, that they must submit to God's oracle, that the blessing is going to come through Jacob and through his family.

It seems that Isaac wants to do salvation his way. He wants to persuade God that he knows better than God about how his plan is going to come out.

Again, that's not an uncommon thing, is it, for Christian parents? Yes. God tells us in his word that what we are to do with our children is to lay hold upon him in faith.

[18:24] We are to teach our children the word of God from their infancy. We are to go on teaching them God's truth. We are to nurture them in the household of faith. We are to teach them to trust and obey God's word.

The nurture and the admonition of faith. And yet, many Christian parents today and many Christian youth workers today want to do the very opposite, don't they? They don't give young people too much Bible.

That will put them off. We don't want to put them off. Let's just keep it Bible-like. There's plenty of time for that later. Let's give them Christianized entertainment just to keep them out of the worst trouble.

And that will be the best way for them to come up as Christian. Well, of course, the result of that catastrophic folly is all around us today in churches that are utterly denuded of any young people after the age of about 12.

What a mess we so often make when we think we can do God's salvation better than he can. Well, these verses don't give a happy or a healthy picture of this family, do they?

[19:24] What a sad follow-up to that wonderful romance and marriage that we saw in chapter 24. Bruce Walkie again has a helpful comment. A marriage, he says, made in heaven can end in dysfunction when a spouse gives priority to taste in the mouth over a voice in their heart.

And how true that is. And many other tastes in life as well. Yeah, doesn't all this, once again, just focus on the wonder of God's grace and God's mercy?

None of the four characters in this story really cover themselves with any glory. All of them have major defects. And yet, God has committed himself to this family.

And he's going to work through this family. And his purpose will prevail through this family. But though God's purpose will prevail despite sin and weakness of his people, sin does have consequences.

And God will not be mocked. And that's the sobering message of this next scene that we see in verses 29 to 34, as we see a despising unveiled.

[20 : 38] The background of verses 27 and 28 paved the way for this story, which again, on the surface, is just about a compact over cooking. But again, also betrays a much deeper reality about content for the covenant.

And for the God of the covenant. The scene that unfolds in verses 29 and 30 suggests to us that it's pretty typical of Esau's behavior. He charges in after one of his hunting expeditions, and he wants food, and he wants it fast.

Literally, the text says, let me have the red stuff, the red stuff. It seems to be typical of his behavior. It seems that it's one of his habitual mantras.

Give me the red stuff, give me the red stuff. Because the little bit in brackets there tell us that that was what gave him his nickname. The word Adom, meaning red. Sounds like Edom. So it seems that Esau is a guy who is known for always shouting for Adom.

You don't get called Drunken Duncan just if you've had too much to drink on one night, do you? You don't get called Mack the Hack if just once on the football field you gave somebody a kick in the leg.

[21 : 49] It's a habitual behavior. That's what gives you a nickname, and that's what we're being told about Esau here. Esau the red. The picture we're given is a man who habitually focused on the needs of his body.

He was the sort of man who had a mind that deferred to his body. As William Stowe put it, we expect that in animals, but not in those created in the divine image, and who are given minds to control their bodies.

So maybe this scene had happened many times before. I guess it probably had. But this time, something happened that turned it into a moment of real destiny. What do you think verse 31 does signify?

Many commentators slam Jacob here. Oh, here's Jacob taking the devil's shortcut, they say. Well, that may be so. I'm not so sure. John Calvin is a bit more generous to Jacob, and I think the text itself is a bit more generous to Jacob here.

Certainly, Jacob does seem to exploit Esau's hunger, who would not condemn Jacob for his inhumanity, says Calvin. But what kind of question is it in verse 31, do you think, when Jacob says, give me your birthright now?

[23 : 09] Is it a jest, perhaps? Yes, yes, Esau, you're dying of hunger as usual. Okay, then, well, you might as well give me your birthright, because you won't be needing it if you're dead, will you? Is it a jest like that?

Maybe. Or is it, perhaps, a more serious question? Is it a test? Does Jacob want to see just how much Esau really does care, if at all, about what ought to be the most central concern of both brothers, and indeed the whole family?

I'm not sure. But even if Jacob's motivation was wrong, I'm not sure it was, certainly he's not deceiving here, it's just very plain talking.

But even if Jacob's method is wrong, his desire and his sense of value is surely right, isn't it? He's seeking to confirm for himself the truth of the promise that God made about him, even before his birth.

Again, as Calvin puts it, he wants the more fully to establish the certainty of his own election. In other words, whatever Jacob might be lacking in his method, he is surely seeking what God values, and what God has taught him to value, the birthright, the privilege of the firstborn.

[24 : 26] The firstborn had a privilege status. Every firstborn belonged by rights to God. Firstborn status conferred headship of the family upon somebody.

It was much, much more than just about possessions. Yes, they got a double portion compared to all the other brothers of the possessions, but it was much more than that. It was about position. It was about the future also, and its value is something that could therefore only be grasped by faith. And in this family, whoever possessed the birthright would inherit the blessings of the covenant that God had made with Abraham, and that Abraham had transmitted to Isaac.

So whatever we might think of Jacob, the text is absolutely clear here. Esau, Esau cared nothing, nothing at all for this greatest of God's blessings.

Not once or twice, but three times in as many verses. We're told that, aren't we? So clearly, verse 22, of what use is a birthright to me? Verse 33, he sold his birthright.

[25 : 33] And verse 34, so Esau despised his birthright. And even more than that, he did it without even giving it a second thought to what he was doing, verse 34.

Look at how staccato it is. He ate and drank and rose and went his way. Not a care in the world. Having satisfied his appetite, says John Calvin, Esau didn't consider that he had sacrificed a blessing far more valuable than a hundred lives to purchase a repast which would not last half an hour.

And Derek Kidner is absolutely right in his commentary when he says, this chapter does not comment, so Jacob supplanted his brother, but so Esau despised his birthright.

Through this episode, which no doubt shows us each brother's conduct is far from perfect.

Nevertheless, God brings to light through it that which is hidden in their hearts.

And in Esau's heart, what we see is the unveiling of a despising, of a contempt for God's prize, for the thing that God exalts above everything else, his name and his word of promise.

[26 : 55] And he who despises what God treasures above all other things cannot but be despised by God. Thus, Esau despised his birthright.

Don't you think it's very significant, very significant, that these verses here sit right alongside, right after, a story that tells us unequivocally and clearly all about God's absolute sovereignty in election and predestination.

That verse 23 in that oracle sits right here beside verse 34 to remind us that yes, God is sovereign in his saving grace.

No one is saved by himself, not by works, but by God's call. Jacob was chosen because God had mercy on him. And yet, at the same time, we're told equally about the responsibility that human beings have for their own perdition.

Esau despised his birthright. God did not compel Esau to do what Esau did not want to do. Esau cared nothing for it.

[28 : 06] Esau sold it willingly without a care in the world. That's why he forfeited his blessing. Hebrews 12, verse 17 tells us that plainly, Esau was unholy, selling his birthright for a single meal, so he was rejected.

That's why he found no chance to repent. You see, the privileges, the enormous privileges of God's grace can be forfeited, even within the professing family of faith.

Even within those who have been blessed by God to be the stewards of that grace to the whole world. Where there's refusal to submit to that grace of God.

Where there's contempt for his saving righteousness through the promise of the Christ to come.

That's the painful point, isn't it, of the whole of Paul's argument all the way through Romans 9 to 11.

It's also the basis of the very real and sobering warnings that come to us all through the book of Hebrews. Individuals are responsible. And individuals who have received the great privileges of the household of covenant faith are even more responsible than anybody else to taste the goodness of the word of God, to taste the powers of the age to come and yet to hold in contempt the covenant God and the Christ of God.

[29 : 32] That's the greatest sin in all the world, isn't it? Therefore, it incurs the worst punishment of all, according to the scriptures. And yet that was Esau.

He despised his birthright. He had contempt for God and for his covenant. Because he was determined in his desire to sacrifice that which was divine and eternal, that which ought to have been his greatest treasure, to sacrifice it for something that was merely temporary and immediate. And it wasn't just a slip-up, was it? It wasn't just an accident. We're told that Esau was purposeful and he was definite. He swore an oath. He solemnly confirmed his contemptuous rejection of God's covenant privilege.

Because the appetites of this world had buried the appetite for God and his promise which is eternal. That's why Hebrews 12 holds up Esau as the very antithesis of the true faith of Hebrews chapter 11.

Abraham lived for a heavenly city, not an earthly one. Moses rejected the treasures of Egypt and rather took the scorn of Christ because he looked for the reward, the promise of the future.

[30 : 55] They set their hearts on the unseen because they saw him who is invisible. But not Esau. Esau saw only the immediate, the visible, the things of this world.

not just Esau, of course, alas. Many even within the New Testament church, the New Testament professing church of Christ.

Many, says Paul, are enemies of the cross of Christ. He writes to the Philippians, their God is their stomach also, their glory is their shame with minds set on earthly things, and their end is

destruction.

Just the same. That's a real warning, isn't it, for Christ's apostle to the professing Christian church? A real warning, that it's possible to walk in opposition to the cross of Christ, with your God as your stomach.

See, this story tells us where it begins. It begins with Isaac drifting into allowing spiritual appetites to be eclipsed by earthly ones, and in Esau, such appetites becoming habits, and then a full-blown addiction to the things of this world, a love for the seen, that buries a desire for the unseen.

[32 : 13] And in the end, a total loss of perspective on everything that really matters. And that does happen in the church, doesn't it? We see it. Sometimes, yes, it is, the very visibly obvious destructive attitudes like drink or like sex or like drugs.

None of us should ever think, by the way, that we're going to be immune from these things either, given the right circumstances. But often it is just much more respectable appetites.

Venison stew is hardly a catastrophic thing in itself, is it? But it was Isaac's ruin. Well, often it is.

Other things, love of culture, love of music, love of the opera, love of the arts, fine restaurants and hotels and cruise ships, perhaps, the golf club, the country home, self-indulgence that masquerades as talking about quality time away with the family and so on.

Any one of these things which can be very good in themselves, things which can actually serve our Christian life and witness, rightly used, any one of them can also end up utterly choking and stifling and eventually killing off our desire for our true birthright, can't they?

Stifling our desire for the only thing that really matters in the end, the only verdict that ever matters for eternity. It doesn't matter, does it, in the end, what is going to be written on your tombstone or mine, but it does matter what the epitaph of God is going to be upon your life and upon mine.

[33 : 51] Whether it says he cherished his birthright or whether it says she despised her birthright. Isn't that what this story is teaching us?

Those who profess to belong to the people of God today, it's a loving warning, isn't it, in our Bibles? Let me draw to a close with three applications that the Bible itself gives to this story.

First of all, don't blame God. That's Paul's application in Romans, isn't it? God. Those who will not inherit the kingdom of God and those who suffer loss, they will suffer it because they despise and reject God's grace in Christ.

Their rejection is an outworking of that because in the end, God simply gives them the desires of their hearts. No one will ever be able to say, oh, I'm not elect, therefore it's not my fault.

The Bible says absolutely no to that attitude. Yes, it affirms God's absolute sovereignty in grace and in election, but it also affirms equally clearly man's responsibility for rejecting God.

[35 : 11] Esau did not want to be chosen. Esau didn't care if he wasn't chosen. Esau looked with contempt at the covenant. And that is the most heinous rejection of God himself.

God cannot but hate those who despise his covenant because it is to despise and hold in contempt a salvation that was at the cost of the blood of his own beloved son.

God cannot but turn his face from those who profane the blood of the covenant, who are outraging the spirit of his grace. That's why our Westminster confession of faith, affirms that God has chosen in Christ and to everlasting glory out of his mere free grace and love those whom he has saved to the praise of his glorious grace.

And also affirms that he passes by others to ordain them to wrath and dishonor for their sins. Esau had no complaint.

Esau chose his destiny freely. The Lord Jesus is just as clear, isn't he, in his teaching. In John 6 verse 37 he says, All that the Father gives to me will come to me.

[36 : 38] That is sheer sovereign grace. But the sentence goes on, And whoever comes to me I will never cast out. Verse 39 of that chapter he says, This is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose nothing of all he has given me.

Sovereign grace. But he goes right on, For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life.

It is you who chooses to reject and you who brings that blame upon yourself if you do so according to Jesus.

Matthew 25, Jesus is just as clear. No one who hears these terrible words from Jesus on the day of judgment, Depart from me you cursed and enter into the eternal fire.

None of them will ever be those who have just stumbled by accident into error. No. There will be those who like Esau have despised and scorned the precious covenant of grace in the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Savior.

[37 : 50] Don't blame God, says the Bible. There will be nobody in hell who hasn't shown contempt for the blood of the covenant, who hasn't outraged the spirit of grace.

second application the Bible gives of this story. Don't be naive. Division lies at the very heart of God's kingdom and it has right from the very beginning and it will do right until the very end. Read Jesus teaching, especially the parables in Matthew chapter 13. Wheat and the tares, good fish and the bad, separation. And in the parable of the sower he tells us to expect that division to be visible now as the challenge of the gospel confronts people's lives and unveils the truth about their hearts and goes on challenging people's lives within the professing church. People's choice and people's ongoing choice of the appetites of this world will be revealed or the appetites of eternity will be revealed.

And there will be division depending on those differing attitudes of heart. between those who despise the real gospel and those who love the real Christ and the gospel.

[39 : 11] And so there will always be division unfolding between those, however imperfect, and they're all imperfect, who truly prize the promise of God above everything else, and those who don't and who in fact despise it in their hearts.

And so there will always be enemies of gospel-loving people, people who are true to the promise despite all their inadequacies and sin. And often those bitterest enemies will come from those who once shared the bonds of closest fellowship with them.

That's what the Bible teaches us about Esau's line. Trace it through the Old Testament. You'll see how the Edomites were exceptional enemies of Israel all through history. From their refusal to allow the Israelites to pass through their territory when they were escaping from Egypt and the Exodus, to their siding with the Babylonians against Judah at the time of the exile.

Haman, the Agagite, the Edomite who tried to exterminate all the Jews in Esther's time, was an Edomite. Herod, who massacred the innocents and the birth of Christ, was descended from Edom. They were a race of implacable enemies to Christ, and yet they once shared the same tense, and ate the same food together. People of Esau, just like the people of Ishmael, nothing has changed.

[40 : 38] And that's a constant warning all through the New Testament. It's not outside only, but inside the church that often the most destructive wolves arise from. They wear sheep's clothing, of course, says Jesus, to deceive the naive.

But don't be naive, says the Bible. Isn't the John Stott's comment on Galatians 4, verse 29, and the persecution of the spirit born by those born according to the flesh.

He's speaking of Ishmael, but it would be equally true of Esau. John Stott says, the persecution of the church, of Christian believers who trace their descent from Abraham, is not always by the world, who are strangers and unrelated to us, but by our half-brothers, religious people, the nominal church.

It's always been so. The Lord Jesus was bitterly opposed, rejected, mocked, and condemned by his own nation. The fiercest opponents of the apostle Paul who dogged his footsteps and stirred up strife against them were the official church, the Jews.

The monolithic structure of the medieval papacy persecuted all Protestant minorities with ruthless, unremitting ferocity. And the greatest enemies of the evangelical faith today are not unbelievers, who when they hear the gospel often embrace it, but the church, the establishment, the hierarchy.

[42 : 00] Isaac is always mocked and persecuted by Ishmael, and Jacob by Esau, we could add. Don't be naive, says the Bible.

The spiritual seed of Esau and Ishmael will be alive and kicking within the visible church until the very last day. That's what Jesus' painful warning of the parable of the sower is telling us.

But finally, and above all, the third application that is given to us directly in Hebrews chapter 12, don't be like Esau. Don't despise God's grace, especially if you are somebody who's grown up with the privileges of that grace in the household of faith.

Why did Esau despise that grace? Well, yes, he had appetites for this world that suffocated his desire for what was eternal, what was far, far greater, and maybe that is a word of warning for some of us today.

Is there something in your appetite for this world that is anesthetizing you to the call of God upon your life? It's very often the case. But there was more than that with Esau.

[43 : 17] It was deeper than that. Esau knew that the only way to God's blessing was to bow to God's sovereignty and to go God's way, his chosen way, through Jacob and his line of promise.

There was no other way for the blessing to come to him or anybody else in the family or anybody in the whole world. No other way. And Esau hated that.

Esau hated the scandal of a soul and unique savior. Not Esau's way, not my way, but only God's way.

And just like Cain, he said, what's wrong with my way, God? What's wrong with my sacrifice? And he was filled with anger at his brother. Just so with Esau.

What's wrong with me, God? What's wrong with my chosen lifestyle? Why should I submit to another seed, to Jacob? Why should I submit to the Christian church and its message today?

[44 : 22] These Christians are a rotten lot. These Christians are far from perfect. These Christians are just like Jacob. Why should I submit to them and their way? How dare you? Isn't that what people say and think?

Maybe it's what you think. Well, the answer, friends, was not because Jacob's nature was any better than Esau's.

It certainly wasn't. Far from it. But the answer was that through Jacob, who would become Israel, a prince with God, at last the true Israel would come, who was worthy of Esau's love and his loyalty. and who did have the right to demand from him his utter devotion and his homage as his king and his lord. And it's just so for you today.

If you're indignant, if you're an unbeliever, if you're an agnostic who finds this offensive, just as Jacob, deeply flawed as Jacob was, just as he pointed forward to a real savior, to a real prince with God, so we Israelites, we spiritual descendants of Jacob today, we Christians, full of manifest flaws, just like Jacob, but we also point back to that same real savior, that real prince with God, the promised seed, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[45 : 49] And like Jacob, he was and he is the only mediator of God's saving mercy to this world. He is the only hope of salvation. salvation. But unlike Jacob, unlike Jacob, he didn't come to grasp what was ours and take it for himself.

He came giving up all that was his by birthright, the birthright of the only begotten, glorious son of the father in heaven. And he gave up his birthright willingly and became himself despised and rejected and cursed and treated with contempt, that he might share all the blessings of that eternal birthright with many brothers, with all who will come and bow the knee to him and receive from him what he alone has power and authority to give, the saving grace and mercy of God.

And it's still humbling, isn't it? Terribly humbling to have to bow to another, to have to receive his way and not your way, something utterly undeserved, a gift of sheer mercy that you contribute nothing to.

It's humbling. It's the hardest thing in all the world to do that, especially if you're a big, big man, especially if you're a great man, a powerful man, a man of the world like Esau.

It's a death to all of your pride, all of your achievement, all of your glory. It's hard. But the Bible tells us there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

[47 : 40] So don't be like Esau. Don't despise God's grace. Listen to Jesus, the seed of Jacob. This is the will of my Father, he says, that everyone, everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life and I will raise him up for the last day.

Don't show contempt for him. Left the glory of heaven and shed his blood that you might share his birthright. Don't show contempt for the grace of God in Christ.

But confess him. Confess him as your Savior and your King today. He will give you all that is his and that will last for eternity.

Let's pray. Gracious God, our heavenly Father, we thank you for the seed of Jacob, the prince with God, the true Israel, our Lord Jesus Christ, who humbled himself and made himself nothing that we might share the riches of his grace.

Slay our pride. Slay our self-righteousness, we pray. And grant us to kneel in the dust before this, our Savior, and receive from him all that he has won for us.

[49 : 22] We ask it for his name's sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.