

Disastrous Decision

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now this evening to the New Testament and to the letter to the Hebrews and chapter 12.

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Hebrews 12 and verse 15. But we are going to be keeping a finger in the readings which have already taken place in the Old Testament, the book of Genesis chapter 25 and 27, because the passage in Hebrews refers to this story as an example.

And it says here, See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God. That no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.

That no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterwards when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

[1 : 27] I'm sure that we've all read of disastrous decisions that have been made from time to time.

Here's one I came across, for example. It's about a man called William Orton, who was the president of the Western Union Telegraph Company in America in 1876.

And he was approached by a man called Mr. Alexander Graham Bell, who wanted to sell him the patent of his new invention.

And all he wanted was \$100,000, which actually wasn't a huge sum of money in those days. And Mr. Orton, the president of the Western Union Telegraph Company, went away, and he thought about whether he would buy the patent for this new invention.

And he wrote then a letter to Mr. Bell, and he said, Mr. Bell, after careful consideration of your invention, while it is a very interesting novelty, we have come to the conclusion that it has no commercial possibilities.

[2 : 50] What use could this company make of an electrical toy? And by so doing, he walked away from an absolute fortune.

History is littered with men and women who have made decisions that they lived to regret for the rest of their lives.

Decisions sometimes that they make in the spur of the moment, sometimes they make them quickly, and sometimes they make them slowly, but yet afterwards they realize how not only bad they are, but that they have changed their lives for the worse forever.

Now, sometimes these decisions don't really result in much. Sometimes they can be fatal. But the most important decisions that we will ever be confronted with are the ones that relate to our relationship with God.

And when we and if we make that fatal, disastrous decision, there comes a time when we will be lost.

[4 : 08] And when there will be no possibility of ever receiving the gift that God has offered us in the gospel.

And this tonight is a classic example of someone in the Old Testament who made not only a disastrous decision, but an eternally disastrous one.

One in which he turned his back on the greatest gift that he could possibly have had. And the writer in the Hebrews is telling us, make sure that you do not fail to receive, obtain the grace of God.

That's what he's saying to us tonight. And that's what God is saying to us tonight. Make sure as you go out of here and as you think about the passage that we are considering together, that you do not fail to obtain the grace of God.

Because some, by their decisions, have done exactly that. And they have lost out on the greatest opportunity that anyone could ever have had.

[5 : 22] Now the story of Rebecca and Isaac is a well-known one. Isaac was the son of Abraham. Rebecca was his wife. And they, after a long period of time in marriage, they eventually had twins, Esau and Jacob.

And we very quickly become acquainted with the twins that were very different. You know, any parent will tell you that it's one of the most incredible things that two children growing up in the same home, under the same influences, the same parents, the same environment, the same atmosphere, will grow up to be as different as chalk and cheese.

I'm sure many of you in here have discovered that with your own children or with your grandchildren. It's incredible, really. One child can be incredibly reserved, almost not wanting to say anything, whilst his brother or sister, growing up in exactly the same home, turns out to be the opposite.

Turns out to be boisterous and verbose. You can't get them to shut up. And you can't get them to behave. Whilst the other child is impeccable. What makes for one child to be one way, and the other child to be another way, is, of course, a matter of debate.

It's, nobody knows. Even with all our psychology and psychiatry and know-how, we still can't know for sure why one child will grow up one way and another child's character will be entirely different, even under the same set of circumstances.

[6 : 58] Some children will grow up to accept what they've been taught in the home without ever rebelling. Other children, once they get to a certain age, they'll rebel. And whatever their parent says, if their parent says black, they'll say white, and they'll do exactly the opposite.

And there seems to be very little you can do after a certain age. Believe me, I'm speaking from experience. But there you go. Sometimes you live to see, of course, happily your children reversing that, and as they mature.

And we must never give up on our children. We must never give up, because the relationship between parents and their children is a very precious one and a unique one in the Bible.

It's all about, of course, and this is seen when we have a baptism here in the church, and we're reminded of what children are in the eyes of God. They're not only a precious gift, but when they are born into Christian homes, then God requires parents to bring them up in the discipline and the instruction and the love of God.

And we do so praying, praying more than anything else. Our greatest prayer is that our children will grow up to embrace Jesus as their own saviour and to live for him.

[8 : 06] And that's what we still pray. And tonight, don't give up on your children. Don't stop praying for them, even though it might look as if they may have turned their back on the truth, and they may not be following Christ.

At the moment, they've been brought up in a Christian home, and there's a sense, I've seen this so many times, people who say to me, I never really forgot what I was taught in my Sunday school or in my home.

I've never really, the Bible has always been there somewhere, deep down within my heart. So let's pray for all those who have grown up in this congregation, and let's pray that the Lord will lay his hand upon them and that he'll bring them back, even although they haven't as yet come to that place.

We pray, we do so in faith. But nevertheless, Esau and Jacob are classic examples, even twins. They were even the same age. There was only minutes between them.

And yet, they were as different as chalk and cheese. On the outside, one of them was hairy. His body was covered in hair. And the other one was smooth.

[9 : 13] Esau was an outdoor type. That's what we would call him. He was a hunter. He was always outside. He was doing rough things all the time, doing man stuff. And Jacob was more inclined to the home.

Who knows why? Different nature. Different nurture. Just a different character altogether. And for whatever reason, his father Isaac loved Esau more than he loved Jacob.

Now, that's a big mistake for a start. I guess he loved him because he loved him more because he kind of related to him a bit more. Because Isaac himself liked to be outside hunting game and doing the same kind of stuff.

And he loved him because he identified with him. He probably identified less with him. But the mother, Rebecca, she loved Jacob. Another big mistake. Because you don't love one child more than another.

Even although you may have more things in common with one child than you do have for another. And there may be a natural kind of identification.

[10 : 24] You put that behind you and you love your children the same and you do not show them favoritism. Because every one of them is precious in the eyes of the Lord.

And because every one of them is a gift from God. You see, in these passages, chapter 25 and 27, that's why I wanted to read the whole thing. There are many, many mistakes made.

Even amongst people who were God's people. Isaac was a follower of the Lord. And yet he made mistakes in that passage we read.

Rebekah was one of the Lord's people. Yet she made mistakes. Jacob was loved by God. And yet he makes mistakes. Jacob was sinning in the way that he so easily pretended, I guess with a great deal of nervousness, but he did what his mother wanted him to do.

He pretended to be his brother. He was disguised as his brother when he went in to get the blessing. That was wrong. Isaac was wrong.

[11 : 32] Why was Isaac wrong? Well, I'll tell you why. Because Isaac was trying to, he was trying to go against what God had originally said when the children, when the twins were in the womb of their mother.

Genesis chapter 25, when Rebekah was pregnant with the twins, and they fought, she could feel them fighting, as it were, within her. So she went to the Lord.

She couldn't figure out what this meant. Could this be some kind of spiritual significant? And the Lord answered her. I don't know how he answered her, but he did. And this is what he said.

Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided. One shall be stronger than the other. But listen, the older shall serve the younger.

That was God's promise. That was God's prophecy to Rebekah the mother. Now she must have told her husband of what God had said. But her husband, because he naturally, or I should say naturally, it wasn't rightly, because he favored his older child, he tried to push through his own will over and against the will of God.

[12 : 44] Always a big mistake. Whatever our feelings are, God's word must come first. And this can happen in a whole host of ways.

And maybe I'm speaking to somebody tonight. And you're facing a choice, or you have faced a choice recently to either do what you know is right according to the Bible, and as a Christian, you know that the Bible is your guide.

Your infallible, authoritative guide. That's the word of God to you. But yet there is this strong feeling to do something that's different. Something that's against God's word.

Are you tempted in some way? To put God's word to the side, and because they say, well, I know what God says, I know what God says, but I feel so much to do what I know is wrong.

If you know it's wrong, it's wrong, and you put God's word first, then that God says, those who honor me, I will honor. So whatever your feelings are, don't let them overshadow what God is saying to you.

[13 : 55] And it's very often a choice that will come up in your Christian life. Many as a Christian can testify of how they've struggled and wrestled with on the one hand what God's word is saying to them, and on the other hand, what they feel like doing.

Put your feelings to one side when they conflict with what God is saying. Rebecca was wrong as well. What she's trying to do is she knows, she remembers what God promised when the children were in her womb, that the younger would serve the older, but instead of allowing God to take his own course and to do his own will, she's forcing through God's word.

She's doing God's job for him. She's doing God's work for him. A big mistake. Because, because even although she knows that her husband wants to give the blessing to the wrong person, two wrongs don't make a right.

And so not only must we be motivated by what is right, we must always act in a right manner and in a way that brings glory to God rather than tries to force through what we believe is the right thing.

She encouraged her son to tell lies. She sent him in to her father and she knew that he would be asked, who are you? And she said, when he asks you, you say you're Jacob. Pretend to be Jacob.

[15 : 28] How deceitful is that? How does that accord with a consistent Christian life? It doesn't. It was wrong. Even although she was motivated by the right thing.

She wanted so much for God's word to be fulfilled. The older will serve the younger. Even although we can be motivated by what's right, then it is, if we act wrongly, then we end up sinning and we end up bringing dishonor to God by the way in which we do things.

And the same is true for Jacob. He was wrong. Even although this blessing was precious to him, Jacob's heart was in the right place. But sometimes even our enthusiasm, you might find this strange for me to say this, but sometimes our enthusiasm for God can lead us into the wrong places and the wrong actions.

And yet, even although Isaac and Rebekah and Esau were wrong in their actions, it is, it is, sorry, I should have said Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob were wrong in their actions.

It is Esau that goes down in history as being godless. No one is sexually immoral or unholier like Esau who sold his birthright for a single meal.

[16 : 54] You see, it is the book of Hebrews, the letter to the Hebrews that unpeels the layers of Esau and we get to see what he is like inside.

In Genesis, we get to see what he is like on the outside but in Hebrews, we get to see what he is like on the inside, what is motivating him, what is in his heart. And we get to see that he is fundamentally different from his brother in the sense that Jacob's heart lay with God.

His heart was in the right place. Esau's heart was on himself. Two entirely different people all together in the most important respect.

It tells us that he was sexually immoral. That means that women ruled his emotions and his being. It means that he looked in life for instant, immediate gratification and satisfaction.

And once he got that, he always looked for another satisfaction and another and another and it's always what was instant and immediate. That's what it means to be sexually immoral.

[18 : 05] I'll leave you to work out what it means in this day and age. But compare that with what God requires us which is to look upwards instead of trying to satisfy ourselves and putting ourselves in the first place all the time and what will give me the pleasure to ask how may I glorify God.

That's what God asks us tonight. To love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength. And you see, if you put God in the right place then everything else, if you put him in the first place, then everything else falls into its right perspective.

No wonder tonight how many people there are who have mixed up their lives just because they try, they live their lives on the principle of me first. Whatever my body tells me to do, I want it.

I want it day after day after day. And that's what I live for. But it never makes for contentment and peace and real true happiness.

That can only be found in giving God the glory in your life and submitting and surrendering to him and asking him to forgive your sins and to change your heart and to open your life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[19 : 24] And so he was godless, unholy, that's what it means. No one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau. Now, the question then arises, well, what was so wrong about what Esau did?

In Genesis chapter 5, the story begins with Esau coming in famished. He was absolutely the kind of thing that we would say, I'm absolutely starving. He had been out in the field, he'd been hunting game and his brother was in cooking the food and Esau said to him, you can imagine him coming in in a complete flap and he says, let me eat, I'm absolutely starving, let me eat of some of that red stew for I am exhausted.

The Hebrew language tells us, he said, give me some of that red stuff. That's what it literally means. You can imagine him in a state of what he thought was desperation.

Well, of course he wasn't desperate. If he was desperate, he wouldn't have had the strength to speak. But you see, feelings again. He wants instant gratification. If he feels hungry, he wants fast food.

He wants to satisfy himself all the time and if he's not completely satisfied, then he's going to take whatever steps are necessary to bring that about.

[20 : 47] And Jacob knew this. And he could see that there was something fundamentally wrong with Jacob, that there was a massive difference between the two of them in the most important respects.

And Jacob said, whatever reason, he said, sell me your birthright. Now, give me your birthright and I'll give you the stew. And Esau did the most incredible thing.

Normally, there's no way anyone under any circumstances would have given away the most precious element in his family, which was his birthright. I'll explain to you in a little moment what that means.

But that's what he did. He said, I'm about to die of what use is a birthright to me. He wasn't about to die. He just felt hungry the same way as you and I feel hungry when we've gone all day without food.

He wasn't about to die at all. He just felt that way. And when it came to his feelings as opposed to giving up the most priceless possession that he had, he was prepared to give up.

[21 : 58] And then Jacob gave Esau the bread and the lentil stew and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. Now, what's the birthright? I'm sure you've read that passage often and wondered, well, what exactly did he do that was so wrong?

Well, the birthright, and this is a cultural thing, of course, as much as anything else, the birthright belonged to the oldest son, the firstborn son in the family.

And it was given after the father who was the head of the home was about to die, when he was about to die. And that meant that the firstborn in the family, would become the head of the family.

And that was a place of real authority in those days, and responsibility. And it meant also that he would inherit a double portion of the estate, whatever was on the estate.

And very often, like in this family, the estate would consist of many servants, and animals, and goats, and herds, and cows, and sheep, and all the rest of it. He would have twice as much as anyone else.

[23 : 07] Now, that was what a birthright meant to a normal family at that time living in Palestine. But this was not a normal family.

This family is different. They are in a special, unique relationship with God. They are the most different family in the whole world, because God came to Isaac's father, and he said to him, I will bless you and multiply you.

I will give you the land of Canaan, the whole land on which you're standing, and I will be your God, and you will be my people, and in your seed, every nation of the world will be blessed.

We were thinking about that this morning, how even tonight, what we are doing here is enjoying the blessing of God that he promised to Abraham, 2,000 years BC.

We are in the fulfillment of that promise. We're here tonight because we love the Lord, because we want to rejoice in the Lord. We've found forgiveness and newness of life through coming to know Jesus Christ.

[24 : 20] And God has revealed himself to us and given us the gift of God like you were thinking about this morning with Ian Alistair, the gift of God is eternal. What could be better than that? I ask you, what could be better than God giving us everlasting life through Jesus Christ as a gift?

What an inheritance. You know, remember, the gospel is not just a religion, it's God giving us the most precious gift that anyone could possibly have.

That's why it's described in the Bible as an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled. world. And so when you become a Christian, it's like you walk into a fortune. I mean it.

It's like you become greater than a multi-millionaire. You walk into God's kingdom as a son or as a daughter, as a prince or as a princess of the king.

And God loves you and promises his undying, eternal love forevermore as you come to know him and as you come to follow him. I ask you what greater thing could you possibly have than that?

[25 : 26] It's an inheritance. Incorruptible and undefiled. So the birthright in a family normally meant that the oldest son, he rose up to be the carrier of the headship of that family.

But this time, that the oldest son, or it should have been the oldest son culturally, he was to rise up to carry the blessing of God and to stand for God and to live for God and to witness for God, just as Abraham, his grandfather had and Isaac, his father, had done.

They were the chosen race. And when he felt hungry, when the choice was put to him, now here is where it becomes so ridiculous, isn't it?

It's pathetic. He comes in from the field and Jacob says to him, if you're so hungry, then what about exchanging your birthright for this plate of stew?

And he goes, give me the plate of stew. It's almost a no-brainer to him, is it? He just reaches out his hand and he takes it and he despised, in so doing, he turned his back.

[26 : 45] He must have hated God. He must have had absolutely no time for God at all. When it came to the most precious things, as far as he was concerned, he was out for himself.

He wanted pleasure now. I'm asking you that tonight. Because perhaps you have been faced with the same choice and it comes down to that, doesn't it?

You either live for yourself or you live for God. Christian is someone who's come to see that he needs God's forgiveness and he wants to live for God because God is all that's worth everything that's worth living for.

But a person who chooses to turn away from that, he chooses to put himself or herself first. And to put your opinions and to put your pleasures and your ambitions and your dreams first.

And you say, I only live once. I'm going to just be the happiest person I can possibly be and I'm going to make the most of this life. Well, I can tell you, you'll only make the most of this life by putting God first.

[27 : 48] And that is what Esau completely disregarded. It sounds so ridiculous, but I wonder tonight if you can see how utterly pathetic it is to turn away from what God has done for you.

when we talk about the blessing of God, the blessing was to result in the coming of Jesus into the world. And once again, I'm going to ask you a question I have always asked and I want to ask it one more time.

How much time do you ever give to thinking about what God did to save us? Have you ever really considered carefully that the maker of the universe, the almighty God who created the sun, the moon, the stars, the galaxies, the Milky Way, and all of their millions and billions of light years across, and God is bigger than all of that, and he came down into this world to become a baby.

It's still after over 40 years as a Christian, it still blows my mind to think about that. It stretches my faith. I always end up in the same position where I have to face what I call the two great extremes.

Either it's not true, there's no God, in which case there's no hope, or it is true there is a God, he's done all this, and in which he has done the greatest thing that anyone could ever do or that God could ever have done for me, such was his love.

[29 : 35] The other thing that I wrestle with, why should he love someone like me, who doesn't deserve his love? What have I done to deserve God's love? I haven't.

Neither have you. You see the preciousness, there could not be anything more precious in this whole world than to come to receive and to take what God has done for you in the person of Jesus Christ.

He died. died. He gave his life so that your sin could be forgiven. And you tonight, I don't know, maybe, I don't know what you're thinking as I'm, I don't know whether you're taking in what I'm saying, but I hope you are.

But how do you respond to that? Are you really going to turn away from that? And if you are, then let me ask you, what then are you going to put in his place?

And I'm putting it to you tonight that whatever it is, all it is, is a plate of soup. And once you eat it, it's gone.

[30 : 44] And you've walked away from something priceless. I hope tonight that whatever disastrous decisions have been made in the world, including Mr.

Hortons, not to buy the patent for the telephone, including the many, many other decisions that have been made in the world, which has resulted in many a person bitterly regretting what they've done.

I hope that you won't make the greatest, most disastrous decision that you can ever make, which is to turn away from God's gift.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we pray that you will speak to all of us this evening.

Remind us, O Lord, of what you have done for us in sending your Son into the world to give himself on the cross as the sacrifice for our sin and never let us lose sight of the wonder of the incarnation and the atonement in which God was made to be sin for us so that we might be forgiven and so that we might rise to newness of life.

[32 : 20] And so, Lord, touch our hearts now and we pray that you will hold us, hold our attention beyond this service and keep us from forgetting the great challenge that we've been thinking about this evening.

And we pray that we will never rest until we put our faith and our trust in you. Whatever questions we may have, and there are many of them, we pray, Lord, to discuss them, to debate them, to ask them, but we pray, Lord, that we will at the end of the day be reconciled to a loving, a God who is incomprehensible, who we can never understand.

Lord, give us to submit and to surrender to you by faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.