

Sermon
God's Birthright
Hebrews 12:14-24
July 31, 2016
Scripture Quote from New American Standard Bible

Understandings and Foundations

I for one, as a preaching pastor, know the accounts chronicled in the Bible, and the subject matter overall, is serious and does not present the joy and happiness many are looking for. The Bible accounts for the immense struggle that is on going in the hearts of people. People are pulled to choose their interest over God's interest. Pulled by what? The same force that pulled at Adam and Eve in Genesis three. The Bible represents the struggle man has with God and with himself. There is a conflict in this creation due to "free will choice." God did not program us to automatically accept and surrender to Him. God's love calls for us to choose Him. Love is a choice, not a compulsion. Some do not believe in "free will choice," but the account given in Genesis 2:17 surely present Adam with the choice of life or death. This is at the beginning of God's testimony to us. Other "choice" examples: Romans 10:10-13; Joel 2:32.

Today's biblical lesson is serious, by the nature of God, and is directed at fallen humanity to listen up to God's way of doing things. God pursues **peace** in the creation. God desires to bring an end to the enmity (Eph. 2:6) and strife between Him and people. This pursuance of peace is presented through the incarnation and through believers who function as God's witnesses in this fallen world. We believers want peace, and we want others to see God's peace in us. However, when God came as Jesus Christ with His Good News, that peace is possible with Him and our neighbor, it was rejected. Instead of the fallen world responding with a "thank you," they responded with a crucifixion. Did this stop God because the world was offended? No. God continued His redemptive Message and plan through the lives of the apostles and through us, the saints, today.

Obviously presenting God's peace to another person can be responded to with an accepting heart. We pray for this response. Often times presenting God's peace is greeted with hostility and rebellion. When this happens, does God's Word direct us to give up? No. We may withdraw from a one-on-one conversation when this happens, but then we go to the next opportunity and we continue to **build the structure that is the Church**, and we continue to support God's ongoing Gospel outreach.

The **structure of the Church** is first and foremost the **spiritual Body** of the saints. Second, God has given us physical structures residing on land. These lands and buildings are **auxiliary** to the core definition of the Church, the Ecclesia. However, land is a gift and part of the platform God has given us to witness from. The saints pay for the land with their tithes and offerings to the Lord. The land could have been donated. Perhaps the donor inherited the land and gives it to the **Body of Christ**. However, spiritual understanding will acknowledge that the land and structures are all a gift from God.

So we witness the Gospel from the **Body of Christ**, being believers, and from the **auxiliary** platforms the Lord has blessed us with. Witnessing through these platforms, we at times, receive a hostile response that obviously comes from a disruption within a person or group we are witnessing to. Note, that the party the Gospel offends can be a person who simply

hears your witness and not the person you are talking directly too. However, this does not stop our witness, and working with other believers, because the peace God offers is rejected. We know the Gospel witness causes a condition of non-peace in some people. This we also see in the Bible, hence the Cross. However, we do not stop doing all the things God has called us to in building up the **Body of Christ** including building the auxiliary structures.

With this in mind we read Hebrews 12:14 and following.

Hebrews 12:14 NAS

Pursue peace with all men,
and the sanctification
without which no one will see the Lord.

We desire to pursue peace. However, people and governments throughout history have not responded in kind. This Hebrews passage is balanced with Romans 13:4 and Acts 4:18-20

Romans 13:4 . . . for it (*government*) is a minister of God to you for **good**.

When government stops being good, then we believers who are under God's authority have the biblical standing to resist government. This is when God's peace is rejected. God came as Jesus Christ with a white flag and terms of a peace. "The enemy shot the Messenger." Be it the Messenger is God himself in human form named Jesus. We as believers under God's providence have the duty to carry out God's mission even in the face of opposition. God has established **unalienable rights** for people to live under. This is what God has given and called for as the best environment to live and to further His Gospel Message through. **Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness** is declared in America's Declaration of Independence as rights given by our Creator and entrusted to government to guard and protect.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed

This is what the American founding fathers did. Their goal was to secure these unalienable rights. Admittedly, we fought a civil war over the inclusion of all races into God's good freedom plan. In the course of history, America's Civil War is par for the course. Man, more times than not, implements God's plan partially then has to pay the price.

God defines what is good from the creation account in Genesis. Therefore, in our society today we have a problem with government leaders living outside the good God created.

Government has at times failed to protect unalienable rights. This violation starts with falsehoods. The most glaring example is when elected officials give their word and then time passes and they do not live up to their word. They renege, they break their word. They have lost their good standing and we have the biblical right to resist their oversight of our lives and property. In America we do this by our vote, public protest and at times civil disobedience. One of the best examples in my lifetime is the civil disobedience of Martin Luther King. We have biblical examples.

Acts 4:18-20 NAS ¹⁸ And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; ²⁰ for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard."

There are two biblical lessons we learn from Acts 4. **One** lesson addresses speaking publically in the name of Jesus. **The other lesson** is that when the secular fallen world demands we stop the mission the Lord has sent us to complete we do not surrender to their fallen corrupt self centered, self absorbed will. The "**Parable of the Talents**" in Matthew twenty-five teach us that we have accountability to the Lord for all the things He entrusts us with to carry out God's redemptive plan. We are not to just keep what the Lord has provided for us hidden or not in use. Again the fallen world shouts at us not to use what the Lord has given us to carry out His redemptive plan.

The world sees a contradiction in PEACE

Matthew 10:34 NAS) **"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.**

There seems to be a contradiction in Hebrews 12:14 and Matthew 10:34. Peace is a two edge sword? Jesus teaches us to pursue peace, but we know in Jesus' own life the world does not respond in peace, hence the Cross and martyred saints. We pursue peace, but not at the sacrifice of the spreading of the Gospel using all the provisions, gifts and talents the Lord has equipped us with. God, as Jesus, knew that His Gospel of peace would be rebuked by the fallen world. In His pursuance of peace the enemy became disrupted and there became division among them. Jesus' peace presents a challenge to people to make a choice between Him and a life without Him. This is why the verses after Matthew 10:34 describes families who will be divided because some choose God as Jesus Christ and other rejects His Message and plan for people.

Grace, peace and sanctification

Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble,

and by it many be defiled;

God speaks through the writer of the book of Hebrews making clear His intent for people. Pursue peace, pursue sanctification or no one will see God in you. Again, this is not at the expense of sacrificing your witness to appease the world. Jesus did not stop because His ministry was rejected. Further instruction is given that no one comes short of the "grace" of God. Why does God say this? This is for our protection. For who looks for trouble that is of the Lord? Proclaiming the Gospel in the fallen world will bring trouble. Our goal is not to cause trouble. You do not have to look for trouble. Trouble responds to the Gospel. **Grace is tied to peace and sanctification**. While the rest of the world is in turmoil we are challenged to have an internal peace in our witness, a place where we are joined by God's Holy Spirit. Therefore, peace, sanctification, and grace are guards against bitterness and defilement. The example God uses is Esau. Who disregarded his position in life the Lord had given him, being that of the firstborn.

Genesis 25:29-34 NAS

²⁹ And when Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished;

³⁰ and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished." Therefore his name was called Edom.

³¹ But Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." ³² And Esau said, "Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?"

³³ And Jacob said, "First swear to me"; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau **despised** his birthright.

Esau in the New Testament

Hebrews 12:16 that *there be no immoral or godless person like Esau*, who sold his own birthright for a *single* meal.

¹⁷ For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, **he was rejected**, **for he found no place for repentance**, though he sought for it with tears.

Esau came in from the field and was famished and asked Jacob for some of his stew. Jacob still holding on to his older brother's ankle from birth trying to get ahead of him presented

Esau the proposition of selling his birthright to him for something to eat. Esau complained, what good is his birthright if he were to die of starvation. These are harsh terms for Christian ears to hear. If someone was starving would we hold food back under the same circumstances? No. What is the lesson we are to receive? There is an eternal lesson here. God's view of our life goes beyond our temporal life and extends to eternity with Him.

This is a miraculous view. Esau's father, Isaac, was spared from sacrifice by the hands of Abraham. Seemingly, from a human perspective there was no way out for Isaac, until the Lord provided the ram (Genesis 22:13). Esau could have called upon the Lord to provide food for him, but he did not. Unusual for Esau not to turn to the Lord; having a father and grandfather who lived with the Lord making miraculous life saving gifts. We need to see that God's plan, here for our lives, is already connected to His eternal plan we see in the likes of the Abraham-Isaac event. God as Jesus is our primary example.

Would you be hungry after forty days and nights in the wilderness?

We compare Jesus' witness and example to us after fasting forty days and nights in the wilderness (Matthew 4). Jesus is challenged by Satan. Remember, God came to show us what is possible in our human bodies. The first thing Satan tests Jesus with is bread. Satan challenges Jesus to turn stones into bread if He is the Son of God. Jesus refutes Satan "it is written, man should not live on bread alone but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4; Duet 8:3). We compare this passage in the life of Jesus to Esau.

Esau is looked down upon by Scripture and Jewish tradition because he sold what God had given him. Esau allowed someone else to exchange a temporal value, being food, for his God given birthright that is connected to being a leader within Gods' chosen people who are the world's witnesses in how to have a relationship with God and neighbor. Esau was positioned by birth to be this person for God. Esau surrendered to the wrong authority, his own.

What was so important that Esau gave up?

Remember that the time of Isaac and his sons were before the time of Moses who wrote down the first five books of the Old Testament. The Patriarchal position in the family was the authority and protection the extended family lived under. The birthright was bestowed upon the oldest son to become the patriarch of the family upon the passing of the father. Isaac was the patriarch of his family.

[Note: Ishmael was firstborn to Abraham through Hagar. Isaac was firstborn to Sarah. God made His covenant to the Promised Land through Isaac (Genesis 17:19-21)). Therefore, we see in the Bible the oldest does not always carry out their birthright. Joseph was also not the oldest but became ruler over his older brothers in Egypt.]

In Isaac's day the authority of Patriarch extended over the family to all his children and their children and so on. These were large families and can be viewed as clans or tribes. The

patriarch was the head of all that took place in the family; all economic, protection responsibilities and the spiritual affairs fell under the leadership of the patriarch. This was a big deal for Esau to sell his birthright for a bowl of stew. He was born into this position. His birthright was a gift from God and he came to a place in life whereby he made the decision there was something more valuable than his birthright. His temporal mind told him that he could die if he did not eat right then and there, so he sold his birthright.

Jesus' Birthright – Our Birthright

God planned through the incarnation of himself as Jesus that He is born into a Hebrew family and one day would be responsible for the sins of the world. In fact, this was Jesus' birthright from the time of His birth. Jesus was responsible for the spiritual life of all people. Jesus is the head of the Church and gave His earthly life in substitutionary atonement for the sins of the world (1 John 22). Again this is Jesus' birthright. We all have birthrights from God; meaning that God has a plan for our lives that we should walk in (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Jesus demonstrates to us after fasting forty days in the wilderness that His human temporal body was at a very weak point. Instead of using His divine powers over nature to feed His starving human body by turning stones into bread as Satan tested Him with, He witnesses to us that the mission God had sent Him to fulfill was more important than feeding His earthly body. Comparing Jesus to Esau; God brought Esau into the world as the firstborn to fulfill the leadership role over his family. Unlike Jesus, Esau in his weakened state sold what God had given him. But, Jesus in His weakened state demonstrates to us that it is possible to refute the circumstances this fallen existence confronts us with and continue on in God's calling and plan for our lives and retain our birthright mission.

Birthright Saints and Leaders

Today, we have our families. We have families we are the parents of. In addition, the, or Fellowship of believers, is a family God has given us. We are responsible to carry out the leadership roles God has born us into. This is confirmed through our spiritual calling to our place of service. We are not to trade our God-given roles for temporal goods or services. Our allegiance is first and foremost to God. As birthright leaders the fallen world places in front of us many test to trade in our God-given position or possessions for a bowl of government stew or for a bowl of secular determination, meaning a person surrenders to the secular world views that then govern their life and possessions. In addition, many in the Church give into to the world's pressures and surrender what God has provided for them. In the Lord's economy of life if you take care of your relationship with the Lord your family will succeed or at least have a better chance of success. For us in our lives, we have been given a post, a station in the land to be a voice for the Lord.

Has God given us a position in our community to be His witness?

Has God given us a building to meet in?

Has God given us land to minister on and from?

Has God given us ministries?

Has God given us relationships?

Has God given us **good** government?

Has God empowered us with His Holy Spirit?

Consider the above list, what out there in the world would you trade any one or all of the above for? Esau traded for a bowl of stew. What would it take for you to turn your back and vote against the church you attend? What would it take for you to vote against the way of life God has outlined in His Holy Word the Bible? Too many elected officials who claim to be Christian do this all the time. Their vote on family issues like marriage and welfare are telling of who they really are. They vote against the very church they attend. These need to repent and confess their sin. God is faithful to forgive them (1 John 1). Their offense is first and foremost against God.

We should not surrender away what God has given us to carry out His ministry; Esau did, and Scripture tells us this is a man who despised his birthright (Genesis 25:34). The word “despised” means to dislike somebody or something intensely and with contempt. In other words, when God and His plan gets in the way of what you want to do in life **you choose you**. You make a preference because you like something more than God. When this battle rages inside a person they develop contempt for God and have a high degree of probability to walk away from God’s plan.

This is illustrated in the Bible. We have an Old Testament Witness in Esau and in the New Testament we have the account in John six.

In John six, Jesus tells the people who had been following Him around that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood. They really liked Jesus’ message and spent a good amount of time with Him. However, they misunderstood, because they did not have spiritual ears and hearts. They had secular ears and hearts. They could not hear and accept spiritual truth. So they walked away. They voted with their feet. Jesus said He knew who they were from the beginning. God, being all knowing, knew Esau would walk away from his birthright. And God knows today who those are in the Church that sing the songs and say the correct things but when great challenges come to carry out God’s mission they walk away and do not support the Body of Christ (Romans 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12; Col. 3:15), which is the Lord our God.

Today the Church is starving and limping along and in a fallen wilderness. The temporal world reaches out to us and says "we will take the pressure off, just join us and shut down your houses of worship, abandon the land God has provided for His witness and stop proclaiming the Gospel which does not bring peace to us. You're in pain and you need us. We will feed you and take care of you, all you have to do is turn away, **like Esau who lived**, and abandon what God has given you and called you to do in your life." The fallen world screams at us to be quiet and go away. The fallen world is Satan's tool to silence the Gospel message. Remember Satan desires to destroy God's creation and every living person that has allegiance to God.

So, God proclaims to us in Hebrews . . . Hebrews 12:15-24 NAS

¹⁸ For you have not come to a *mountain* that may be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,

¹⁹ and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which *sound was such that* those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them.

²⁰ For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned."

²¹ And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling."

²² **But you have come to Mount Zion** and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,

²³ to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect,

²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel.