

Series: "Genesis...The Beginning Continued"

Sermon: "Red Stuff! Red Stuff!"

Text: Genesis 25:27-34

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- An Australian TV show reminded me of the old "Magic Eight Ball" Decision-making device. Ask it a question. Shake it up. It gives you an answer. I think our Sunday School teacher taught us the Magic Eight Ball Decision-Maker was sinful for Christians to use just like Ouija Boards.
- Sometimes it seems to me it would be nice to have a Magic Eight Ball Decision Maker or perhaps the Urim and Thummin that were part of Israel's High Priest's breastplate to help me make choices about matters not addressed in God's Word.
- It would be nice, that is, if we really do make choices—or to say it another way, if choices are real. Maybe God's plan—God's sovereignty—makes the feeling that we get to choose irrelevant because it is only a feeling. It is not real. Everything is already set in concrete. We are only play acting—fulfilling an ordained role.
- The topic of the relationship of God's sovereignty—God's control and man's free will—man's ability to make real choices is a deeper topic than our passage for today addresses. However, there is, at least a hint here of the nature of that relationship in real life. I'll try to remember to point it out at the end of the sermon if I have a real choice to do so.
- Genesis chapter 25, verses 27-34, aren't a systematic theology. They are, however a lesson on "*human choice.*" It would actually be more accurate to say they are a lesson on lies behind human choice. They show us the "*spirit of human choosing*"
- Chapter 25 is an eventful chapter of the book. It condenses big sections of the story of "beginnings" into small spaces with very important lessons found in each space.
- In this chapter, we learn of all the other children of Abraham by other mothers than Sarah and Hagar.

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- We find out Abraham was always careful to distinguish the child of faith, Isaac as the bearer of the family promises in the midst of all the potential confusion over inheritance rights.
- We learn of Abraham's death and his burial in the "promised land" looking forward to the fulfillment of that promises. Abraham has a legacy of *dying* faith as well as *living* faith.
- The chapter reminds us again that the LORD keeps all of his promises perfectly. This remedial lesson comes from the story of what became of Hagar's child by Abraham, Ishmael. He grows to become a nation of hostility just as God said he would.
- Then, still in chapter 25, we read last week about the Isaac and Rebekah's need to trust God for their promised offspring that would carry on the promises by the blessing of the LORD.
- When the birth finally happens, she has twins—two boys who have already been struggling with one another in here womb. This is an indication of what is to come.
- The brothers are given names that remind, by their sound, of the birth experience. These names will become indicators of so much more about their characters as men when their stories play out.
- One boy is called Esau because it sounds like "hairy" and that is what he was. The other is called Jacob because it sounds like "heel" and that is what he did—gripped his brother's heel.
- Very quickly in our verse for today, Moses tells us a telling story of Hairy and Heel. It is a story of contrasts. It is a story of choices. Better, it is a story of the spirit behind choices.
- It is a story that the nation of Israel would need to understand and assimilate into their life as the people of God. It is a story that we need as much or more than they needed it.
- Please look at *Genesis 25:27ff.* **READ Genesis 25:27-34**

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- "The boys grew up" covers lots of ground. As they were growing up, we know, from the ages we were given above that they had at 15 years of potential contact and impact from their grandfather Abraham.
- Mary and I just last week attended a "Grand Parent's Day" at the school of our grandson *Graham*. It was apparent in watching the kids and their grandparents that there can be a special bond between them. Grandparents can influence kids in different ways than parents.
- At times, I think we have neglected to take advantage of that generational connection in how we "do church." We tend to separate the generations for efficiency when the best teaching of some of the deepest truths can take place when we mix the generations. Both children and grandparents can miss out when we don't think about this connection.
- It is not too difficult to imagine that Abraham used any contact during those years to influence Hairy and Heel about the promises of the Lord in their family.
- Given the older would serve the younger knowing and talking about this odd arrangement may be one reason for the family dynamics that developed.
- I cannot imagine Abraham keeping quiet about what the LORD was doing. It was the most important thing in his life of faith. I suspect he tried to teach the boys about faith in the LORD. He may even have used his own mistakes as lessons for them.
- Hairy and Heel know the stories and the promises. The impact of the truth is different on each of them.
- Esau, Hairy, becomes a skillful hunter. He is a man who spends his time away from the family out in the wild, open country.

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- Heel, Jacob, stays closer to the family most of the time. He is described as "*a quiet man*" in the version I read.
- "Quiet" may not convey the meaning that well for us. It refers to a more civilized and socialized man. This comes to mean a more *complete* man when it is used in descriptions later in the Bible.
- What I say next could get me in trouble. It likely got me in even more trouble when I said it in Oregon than it would here. While living in Oregon, I happened to be watching a series on TV that was set in Alaska. The life depicted in that series for Alaska seemed to me to be very much the same as the life many Oregonians wanted to live. It was a life, more alone, more self-sufficient, rougher and tougher out in the wild.
- If you go back to Nimrod, in *Genesis* you will read of his exploits as a great hunter. That was his claim to fame separated from God. It was a lifestyle that fit his autonomy well. If you then trace all the references to hunter/warriors like Nimrod in the OT, you'll find that this is not a lifestyle the LORD tends to hold up as good.
- It is rather the lifestyle of Jacob, living "quietly" with family that God seems to promote. The pastoral life of a shepherd—even a shepherd—a protector of sheep—who becomes King is pictured as better than the lonely life of King who spends all his time conquering with swords and arrows.
- Obviously, there is no absolute separation between hunters and shepherds and shepherds do kill sheep but the contrast is there and it is here in this story of contrasts.
- Just as obviously, those of us who have hunted or who hunt now are not wrong to hunt. We tend to come and go to the wilds. It does not become more our home to us than home where the family is. However, I remember, even as a young hunter, the pull to survive

alone, autonomously in the wilderness—the desire to leave behind civilization and dwell by my own instincts in nature without the aid of others.

- I suspect it is that spirit that makes for the contrast here. Hairy or Esau was consumed by that sense of being a “free spirit” maybe even free from the LORD. This is the sort of man he grew into being.
- Another contrast adds to the family dynamics. Isaac’s favorite of the two is Hairy. Rebekah’s favorite is Heel. My favorite child is always the one I am with at the time.
- Moses says Isaac loved Esau because he had a physical taste for the WILD game that Esau’s life provided by being a wild man out hunting.
- Why did Rebekah love Heel more? Maybe because he stayed home and helped with the family. Maybe because he was less wild and more civilized. I’m not sure which came first—which was the cause and which was the effect—but Jacob was around and likely not so boisterous as Esau when he showed up with dead animals.
- Jacob is at home cooking a stew while Esau is out in the wild hunting. Jacob, perhaps thoughtfully, has prepared food hot ready for hungry family to eat. Esau has not prepared anything, has not eaten and is hungry--“famished.” The word is strong. He **felt** like he was “starving” and going to die that very moment!
- Hairy smells Heel’s stew. Hairy then, in my opinion, makes one of the best statements in all of Scripture that is almost never translated so you can hear what he said and catch the spirit.
- The words translated “red stew” in the NIV are exclaimed twice with a feeling of deadly importance by Esau. Except, the words really mean something like red “**stuff.**”

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- So, the scene is like this. Isaac is calmly stirring a steaming pot of aromatic, carefully prepared red colored stew. Esau comes bursting into the scene smelling the stew feeling like he is dying from hunger and shouts "**RED STUFF!! RED STUFF!!** Give me some before I die!!!"
- BTW, says Moses, the Edomites get their name from Esau also being called Edom, which means "red." So now can call Esau "*Red Hairy.*"
- After you read the rest of the stories about Heel or Jacob who becomes known as "the heel gripper" for tripping-up people with deception and guile, it is easy to conclude this scene is no accident on Jacob's part. It is all arranged.
- He has seen the boisterous, unthinking, loud, Wildman brother of his come back from unsuccessful hunting before. He realizes that Esau, lives by his overwhelming feelings of the moment and he knows how to take advantage of that weakness.
- Sure enough, he hears, "**Red stuff!! Red stuff!!**" He has a plan. While his brother is weak he will get him to make a binding agreement to hand over any normal claim as the firstborn to the primogeniture rights of the firstborn son in the family.
- The LORD has said "the older will serve the younger." Abraham probably kept this truth at the forefront as the boys were growing up. Here is a chance to do what God has promised. Here is a chance to make it happen as it is supposed to be.
- Jacob very clearly has faith in the promises. He just as clearly struggles with having faith in the Promiser to bring about those promises. He must make it happen!
- What was this primogeniture natural birthright of the firstborn that made it so important to Jacob? It was the place of honor in the family after dad died. It was the place of one uniquely belonging to the LORD—so much so that the Law would someday require

sacrifices for the firstborn that acknowledged this special status in the family.

- This birthright brought with it a double portion of the inheritance sons would receive. It made the one who possessed it the protector and leader—the chief of the family clan.
- It was evidently transferable since Esau could sell it. It was important to Jacob because of all the promises it entailed that he would inherit if he possessed it.
- This birthright was a big deal—among the biggest of big deals. It was an especially a big deal in this family because promises from the LORD were attached to it. As I said, Jacob believed this—he had faith. However, he had little faith that God would set him up to inherit the promises even though he was promised this would be the case.
- Esau, in the moment, feeling he was going to die, couldn't have cared less about any future promises of God. He was a man who lived for the moment not the future even if it were supposedly God's promised future.
- The legal and binding exchange is made. A bowl of reddish lentil stew perhaps without even any meat in it—thus a RED STUFF soup and some bread are exchanged in the immediate for one of the most valuable and precious possessions Esau could ever have for the future.
- Immediate gratification of felt needs wins out quickly in this hairy red man over delayed waiting on the Lord for his promises by faith.
- Faith in God's promises and the hope it brings to continue to trust rarely if ever parallel the screaming feelings of the flesh for immediate gratification.

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- Moses comments in conclusion: ***"So Esau (Red Hairy) despised his birthright."***
- "Despised" is an interesting description. It sounds as if it refers to something more than what Esau felt in that moment. It sounds as if this is a way of thinking he holds toward that birthright.
- He has devalued its importance in his life so that when the time comes it holds no more value for him than a bowl of red soup. By thinking and living this way, Esau holds the promises of God in contempt as meaningless rather than treasuring them and allowing them to shape his life.
- ***The immediate, fleeting feelings of his human flesh are more motivating to this man than the eternal, lasting promises of God!***
- This is not simply about a momentary weakness and the choice he made in that moment. This is clearly a predictable behavior of Esau because this has become the spirit of this man.
- Esau's spirit is not a spirit of living by faith in the LORD but rather a spirit of living for the lusts of his flesh. In other words, the choice was really made long before hungry Esau stumbled into soup-making Jacob.
- The choice was what sort of man to be—live for God or the flesh? The soup exchange was an outworking of that choice and what it had produced in the man's life.
- Esau lives by and for satisfying feelings without giving them much thought because he lives for the gratification of the moment not anything future that requires recalling and applying to the situation.
- Jacob is certainly imperfect. His pragmatism and deceptive ways are not God's ways. But, he is a man who believes in the promise of the LORD that the older will serve the younger. He is a man who

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calculates his life to some degree based on that reality so he must stop and think about truth even if he does it in a mixed way.

- Before postmodern philosophy spanked the evangelical churches worship of certainty based on scientific rationalism, this passage was sometimes applied as an argument for living by reason rather than emotions.
- Once we had to admit that even we evangelical interpreters of Scripture can disagree on texts because of the preconceptions we bring to texts of Scripture, we had to be more humble in our hermeneutic and preaching.
- I am not suggesting that there is no absolute truth or that the Bible is not about absolute truth. There is truth and the Bible is God's truth for us. What I am suggesting is we have to at least recognize that our drive for absolute certainty for the sake of control sometimes made us claim a purely rationalistic and scientism approach to Scripture was infallible. It was not and is not.
- We do not worship human reason as our god of control. So, those of you who like to call us "Bibliolaters" as if we worship the ink on a page of paper are creating a strawman.
- However, there is a clear lesson for Israel and for us here. Living by the spirit of fulfilling the immediate feelings of our flesh can cause us to devalue what is more precious than anything this world has to offer and is even worth dying for.
- Living by emotions or feelings—making choices on that basis—will create a spirit of living for the flesh in us just as it did in Red Hairy Esau.
- As imperfectly as he did it, living in light of the promises of God being more valuable than the needs of the moment at least gave Jacob the

opportunity to develop a spirit of faith and to grow up into a man of faith.

- Do feelings and emotions matter in choices? They do. However, they are always to be tempered by the actual truth of God's Word.
- As I always teach the Yutes of our body. In that moment when your flesh cries out to act based on an immediate feeling or an immediate emotion or an immediate craving, in that moment it is almost always too late to decide—too late to choose. You have already chosen based upon the spirit you have developed. Is it the spirit of the flesh that demands action or a spirit of truth from God you trust?
- To develop that spirit of truth and faith one must know truth they are to pause and to trust. One must know what God has said is more infinitely valuable than what feels so valuable in that moment.
- The flesh can make you feel that you are going to die if you don't immediately give into a felt need even if it despises—devalues—and rejects what God's Word—his truth has said is truly of eternal value.
- I don't think I need to say much for most of us to see how this truth was so important for Israel and is so important for us.
- ***Red stuff!! Red stuff!! Give me the Red stuff I feel I need right now or I will die!!!***
- ***Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding—shaped by your immediate feelings. In all your ways acknowledge him—and this requires knowing what he says is his truth from his Word—and he will direct your paths.***
- Oh yes! Almost forgot. What does this story hint for us about how the sovereign control of God and human choice both exist? God did not need to send an angel or cast a curse on Esau to get him to FREELY choose to despise the birthright so the older would serve the younger. No Esau freely chose to sell it because of the spirit he had

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chosen to develop. A spirit of immediately gratifying the flesh as led by feelings instead of a spirit of faith and trusting God to work out his promises while we await our sense of fulfillment.

- ***Esau freely chose God's sovereign plan.***