

# SELLING OUT OUR HERITAGE

Sermon, July 12, 2020

Texts: Genesis 25:19-34; Hebrews 12:14-17

In light of recent events, this sermon kept getting longer throughout the week, so I opted to cut a swath out, make an insert of the poem enclosed in your bulletins this morning, and summarize in these introductory remarks which really should be an entire sermon in itself. I'd like to read (*slightly edited*) excerpts from Kevin McCullough's op-ed of last Sunday entitled "*Six Weeks, Six Cities, 600 Murders*."<sup>1</sup> "*The single most important domestic issue of our time is not the rising number of new people testing positive for COVID-19. Deaths have hit all-time lows. The single most important issue, affecting some of the largest swaths of populations in America, is the scandal the media ignores even as it explodes in our faces. In only six weeks, city after city has seen a massive expansion in lawlessness, violence, and murder. -- They are allowing Marxists and anarchists to create complete chaos and disorder. They also seem utterly unconcerned about any lives mattering, black or white. -- Six cities accounted for over six hundred deaths over a six week period ... New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Washington DC, Minneapolis. -- In the city of Minneapolis within 30 days [after the death of George Floyd] a record 1,600 shots [were] fired ... and the city council responded by voting to dismantle its police operations all together.*"

So much that can be said, but suffice it to say for now the following: Our reading from Hebrews begins, "*Strive for peace with ALL.*" Or, as the JB Phillips translation has it, "*Let it be your ambition to live at peace with all men.*" Peace, wholeness, shalom must be pursued, it must be worked for, it requires constructive and constant and cooperative effort. Rudyard Kipling wrote (*fifth verse of the attached poem*) "*Our England is a garden, and such gardens are not made By singing, "oh how beautiful" and sitting in the shade. While better men than we go out and start their working lives At grubbing weeds from gravel-paths with broken dinner knives.*" Gardens and civil societies are made, cultivated, nurtured by the constructive efforts and unique skills of many; in fact, one might say it is in our heritage to be gardeners, as Adam was a gardener ... and to engage in destruction, dissipation, looting, rioting, erasure of the past is to despise our heritage, it is a betrayal of our birthright.

Mr. Lewis Grade, better known in England as international film and television magnate Lord Grade (*and, to his critics, Low Grade*) was instrumental in bringing The Muppet Show to the screen in 1976 after Jim Henson failed to get anyone interested on this side of the Atlantic. Lew Grade's promotion eventually led to the Muppets wide success on both sides of the Atlantic and around the world (*Henson chose to immortalize the great producer through the character Lew Lord in The Muppet Movie played by Orson Wells*). The story is told about how Lew Grade once visited a London theatre and saw a performance he considered to be magnificent. He was particularly enthralled by two of the performers. He rushed backstage after the show, congratulated the two and promised to make them big stars if they would sign up with him as their agent. In his excitement, he failed to fully introduce himself! They demurred, saying that they were happy with their present agent. Lew Grade then promised to *double* the money they were then getting from their present agent. The two performers then took interest; they were most enthusiastic about the offer, and they accepted it there on the spot! Mr. Grade then asked, "*Who's your agent at the moment? I'll take care of contacting him for you.*" They replied, "*Lew Grade.*"

What was Lord Grade to do? Being a man of his word, Lord Grade made good on his offer, even though he wound up paying double for a privilege that was already his! Because of his impetuosity and ignorance of his own privileges, he ended up incurring a dear debt to pay for a contract that was his in the first place!

In a very real sense, that is what Adam and Eve did in the Garden. You'll remember the temptation was that they would be like God if they would eat of the fruit. What Adam and Eve seemed to have forgotten is that being God-like was their birthright! As stated in Genesis 1:27, "*God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female he created them.*" The irony of the account is that had Adam and Eve patiently endured the testing in the Garden, they indeed would have been more like God, with all the wisdom, insight and rights that would entail. The potential of being Godlike was already theirs; it was their birthright, they simply had to grow up into it through disciplined obedience. They did have a God-given desire to be like God; there was nothing wrong with the desire! However, the Deceiver manipulated that God-given desire, and led Adam and Eve to attempt to fulfill the desire in a way other than what God had ordained. Through disobedience born of this impatient desire to satisfy a longing, they sold out their birthright for what amounted to nothing more than a cheap bite of fruit. Like Lew Grade, through an impetuous act they sought to secure something already theirs. And like Mr. Grade, they ended up paying dearly for their rash and foolish action. They sold their heritage, their birthright, for something cheap. However, it is significant this account takes place at the beginning of the Bible. The rest of the Scriptures speak of how God buys our birthright back for us, how He *redeems and restores* us through Jesus Christ and makes us His children once again. And the end result of our salvation and sanctification through Jesus Christ is that we will one day be like God after all, "*...we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him face to face (1 John 3:2).*" By grace, the image of God will one day be fully restored in each of us.

We read of another sold out birthright this morning, another squandered heritage. A bit of background: After some twenty years of not being able to bear children, Isaac and his wife, Rebekah, were expecting. Even before the

<sup>1</sup> The full column may be found at <https://townhall.com/columnists/kevinmccullough/2020/07/05/six-weeks-six-cities-600-murders-n2571887>

boys were born, there was intense rivalry between them (*the parents seem to have fed that rivalry by playing favorites as the children grew, but I'm getting ahead of the story!*). Esau was born first; we are told his whole body was like a hairy garment ... as explained in the footnote, his name literally means "Hairy" (*which sort of reminds me of my oldest brother; Alan had the dubious honor of being sent home from school for not shaving ... in 7th grade.*) Esau made his way out of the womb first; however, the second son comes out of the womb with his fist firmly wrapped in an iron-clad grasp around his brother's heel, almost as if to say, "Oh, no you don't! Me First!" As also explained in the footnote, his name, Jacob, literally means "He who grasps the heel." "Grabbing one's heel" is the Hebrew equivalent to our "pulling one's leg"--- so the name Jacob figuratively means "deceiver, trickster." So we have the twin boys, Hairy and the Trickster. Even from birth, Jacob seemed determined to pull his brother's leg, to grab his brother's heel, by hook or crook to yank Esau out of his place of first-born privilege.

As the story continues, one day Esau came in from the hunting fields, hungry. He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." Esau said, "Look, I am about to die," (*colloquially, he's probably using hyperbole and saying something like, "I'm starving to death."*) "What good is the birthright to me?" Jacob responded, "Swear to me first." So Esau swore an oath, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and lentil stew. Esau ate and drank, and then got up and left. And the story ends by saying, "So Esau despised his birthright." It seems Esau couldn't have cared less about his birthright; gratification of an immediate bodily appetite seemed to be all that mattered to him ... "*Heritage and tradition and family honor ... heck with all that; I'm hungry!*" There's nothing wrong with being hungry, and Esau was hungry! Hunger is a God-given desire; however, Esau satisfied that God-given desire by squandering something precious. As the text says, Esau *despised* his birthright as first-born son and heir of the promises made by God to Abraham and Isaac. He despised this heritage in that he treated it *lightly*, he treated it as insignificant. Because he took his birthright so lightly, he willingly **sold it out** for a bowl of stew to satisfy a passing hunger.

Hebrews 12:15-17. "*See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God (or, as the JB Phillips translation has it, "respond to the graced God offers,") and that no root of bitterness spring up and cause trouble and by it the many become defiled (Phillips: "a bitter spirit which not only hurts your life but poisons the lives of others,"). See that no one be immoral, or irreligious like Esau (Phillips: "falls into impurity or loses his reverence for things of God"), who for a single meal sold his birthright, his inheritance rights, as the oldest son (Phillips: "to satisfy a momentary hunger of the body"). Afterward, as you know, when he desired to inherit this blessing which was his birthright, he was rejected, he was refused. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears."* So; the author of Hebrews intimates and admonishes don't miss out on God's blessing by being "immoral" or "godless" like Esau.

Now, what does trading a birthright for a bowl of stew have to do with impurity, immorality, godlessness? We do have a bit of a translation difficulty in the text. The adjectives translated in as "immoral or impure" and "godless and irreligious" are actually **nouns** (*not adjectives*) in the original Greek. They might be better rendered as "fornicator" and "profaner," as indeed they are rendered by the KJV. The "profane person" is one who trifles with what is precious and sacred, one who treats the precious and the sacred with contempt, one who treats the precious and the sacred *lightly*. The word "fornicator" strictly means one who engages in sexual activity outside of the marital bond, but the word has an interesting derivation in the Greek. The word in the Greek is Pornos; we get our word Pornography from it. It comes from a root word which means "to sell" and carries with it a subtle connotation of "selling OUT." The fornicator *sells out* or *gives out* something precious for something profane; he/she exchanges something precious for something cheap. The prostitute may do that in a very concrete way, bartering sexuality for money, but in a sense all sin is a selling out of something very precious to satisfy a comparatively cheap desire. "**Selling out**" is the compromising of a person's integrity, morality or principles in exchange for short term personal gain ... e.g., the overly ambitious sells out something precious like integrity and principle, or family or honor, for something profane, something cheap like a bigger office or a larger car or perceived professional prestige. In politics, a "sellout" is a person claiming to adhere to one ideology, only to follow these claims up with actions contradicting the professed ideology ... such as a revolutionary group claiming to fight for a particular cause, but failing to honor that cause in the process of obtaining power. The writer of Hebrews intimates Esau *sold out*, he *prostituted* his birthright, he *fornicated away* something precious and irretrievable for a momentary and fleeting pleasure ... and he lived to bitterly regret it.

The implication is that we are in danger of spiritual fornication, selling out our heritage, when we take lightly things God calls precious. For example, the virtues of fidelity, integrity, honesty, loyalty, faithfulness are very precious, and many are the pressures in our culture to forgo these lofty ideals for the moral equivalents of bowls of stew. The Scriptures promise that God will give us the deep desires of our hearts, He *will* fully satisfy our every longing, if we do things His way and wait upon His good timing ... and faithfully tend to our plots of garden. As the author of Hebrews reminds us, the blessing is ours by birthright; let us *not* sell out our heritage for some transitory comfort. It just isn't worth it! Wait for God and His good timing, and He will satisfy the desires of your heart.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> A member emailed me later in the day a profound and related insight: "The destructive protests in this country that claim to be improving or correcting our country's heritage, seem bent on permanently removing all our heritage that is good which includes the blueprint to make lawful changes that was laid out long ago. If those people who despise our country's heritage are successful, that good heritage can no more be brought back than Esau's heritage, once he had despised his birthright. It is timely to hear this truth again today."

## THE GLORY OF THE GARDEN

Our England is a garden that is full of stately views,  
Of borders, beds and shrubberies and lawns and avenues,  
With statues on the terraces and peacocks strutting by;  
But the Glory of the Garden lies in more than meets the eye.

For where the old thick laurels grow, along the thin red wall,  
You'll find the tool-and-potting-sheds which are the heart of all  
The cold-frames and the hot-houses, the dung-pits and the tanks,  
The rollers, carts, and drain-pipes, with the barrows and the planks.

And there you'll see the gardeners, the men and 'prentice boys  
Told off to do as they are bid and do it without noise;  
For, except when seeds are planted and we shout to scare the birds,  
The Glory of the Garden, it abideth not in words.

And some can pot begonias and some can bud a rose,  
And some are hardly fit to trust with anything that grows;  
But they can roll and trim the lawns and sift the sand and loam,  
For the Glory of the Garden occupieth all who come.

Our England is a garden, and such gardens are not made  
By singing, "Oh, how beautiful," and sitting in the shade  
While better men than we go out and start their working lives  
At grubbing weeds from gravel-paths with broken dinner-knives.

There's not a pair of legs so thin, there's not a head so thick,  
There's not a hand so weak and white, nor yet a heart so sick  
But it can find some needful job that's crying to be done,  
For the Glory of the Garden glorifieth every one.

Then seek your job with thankfulness and work till further orders,  
If it's only netting strawberries or killing slugs on borders;  
And when your back stops aching and your hands begin to harden,  
You will find yourself a partner in the Glory of the Garden.

Oh, Adam was a gardener, and God who made him sees  
That half a proper gardener's work is done upon his knees,  
So when your work is finished, you can wash your hands and pray  
For the Glory of the Garden that it may not pass away!

And the Glory of the Garden, it shall never pass away!

Rudyard Kipling