

## SELLING OUT

Sermon, July 10, 2011

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

Mr. Lewis Grade, better known in England as international film and television magnate Lord Grade (and, to his critics, Low Grade) was, among other claims to fame, 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. 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 (*for detailed information, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lew\\_Grade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lew_Grade)*). 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 performers and promised to make them big stars if they would sign up with him as their agent. In his excitement, he never even bothered to 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 ended up paying double for a privilege that was already his. Because of his rash 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 similar to what Adam and Eve did in the Garden. 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 like God, with all the wisdom, insight and rights that would entail. The potential of being like God 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 lost their birthright for what amounted to nothing more than a 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 impetuous action. They squandered 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* us through Jesus Christ and makes us His children once again. 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)," the image of God will be fully restored in each of us.

We read of another squandered birthright this morning, another birthright lost by impetuosity and deception. After some twenty years of not being able to bear children, Isaac and his wife, Rebekkah, were expecting. Even before the boys were born, there was intense rivalry between them (*and the parents seem to have fed that rivalry by playing favorites*). Esau was born first, and we are told his whole body was like a hairy garment ... as explained in the footnote, his name literally means "Hairy." That reminds me of my oldest brother; Alan had the dubious honor of being sent home from school for not shaving ... in the seventh 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"--- the name Jacob figuratively means "deceiver, trickster." So we have the twin boys, Hairy and the Trickster. Even from birth, Jacob seemed determined to grab his brother's heel (or "pull his leg") and yank Esau out of his place of first-born privilege by trickery.

As the story continues, Esau was an outdoors type; Jacob was more of the "in tents" type. 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." "Look, I am about to die," (*colloquially, he's probably using hyperbole and saying something like, "I'm starving to death."*) Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?" But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He 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, he considered it insignificant, and gratification of an immediate bodily appetite seemed to be all that mattered to him. "Heritage and tradition and family honor be damned; I'm hungry!" And Jacob pressed his advantage.

There's nothing wrong with being hungry, and Esau was hungry! Hunger is a God-given desire; however, Esau satisfied that 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 took it *lightly*, he treated it as insignificant. Because he took his birthright so lightly, he willingly sold out for a bowl of stew to satisfy a passing hunger.

Hebrews 12:15-17. "*See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.*" Esau missed out on his father's blessing, and all that entailed; the author of Hebrews admonishes, "*Don't miss out on the Heavenly Father's blessing by being like Esau.*" Don't miss out on God's blessing, the author writes, by being "sexually immoral" or "godless" like Esau. Now, what does trading a birthright for a bowl of stew have to do with sexuality and godlessness? We do have a translation difficulty in the text. The adjectives translated in the NIV as "sexually immoral" or "godless" 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 word "profaner" means 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*. "*Don't be a profaner like Esau,*" the King James translation says. Just as Esau lost out on the blessing of *his* father because he treated his birthright as insignificant, the one who treats the things of God as insignificant risks missing out on the blessing of the Heavenly Father.

Now for the more difficult translation: "*Don't be a fornicator like Esau.*" The word "fornicator" strictly means one who engages in sexual activity with another 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 does it in a very concrete way, bartering sexuality for money, but one does not have to be a professional prostitute to "sell out" sexually. *Anyone* involved in sexual sin is involved in selling out something very precious to satisfy a present, passing desire; but, that's another sermon. Nor is this confined to sexuality; 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. The writer of Hebrews intimates that Esau *sold out*, he *prostituted* his birthright, he *fornicated away* something precious and irretrievable for a momentary and fleeting pleasure, for the sake of immediate comfort. "*Don't be a fornicator like Esau.*" As the text tells us, Esau lived to bitterly regret his action.

The implication is that we are in danger of spiritual fornication, selling out, when we take lightly things God calls precious. For example, the virtues of fidelity, integrity, honesty, loyalty, faithfulness are very precious to God. Many are the pressures in our culture to forgo these lofty ideals for the moral equivalents of bowls of pottage via billboards, cinema, the TV, or the click of a computer mouse. Much in our culture presses for immediate gratification, immediate comfort, immediate indulgence even if it means flaunting traditions, breaking vows, cheating, sacrificing your family, and so on. 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. As the author of Hebrews reminds us, the blessing is ours by birthright; let us *not* sell it out, let us not risk squandering a rich blessing for some fleeting satisfaction, for some momentary comfort. It just isn't worth it! Don't sell out. Don't be like Esau, don't be like Adam and Eve, don't be like Lew Grade, all who paid exorbitant prices to satisfy fleeting desires. Wait for God and His good timing, and you will find satisfaction!