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Moments of Madness



Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears , Hebrews 12:16-17.

The synopsis of a sermon preached in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on Lord's Day 8th November 1998 by Rev. Ivan Foster

The full story of the downfall of Ron Davies, former Secretary of State for Wales, will likely never be known by the general public. We will be none the poorer for that. One thing is known, however. He condemned himself as a madman for acting as he did. The whole chain of events which left his political career in tatters began, he says, with a "moment of madness."

1] Much harm can be wrought in a moment. The human race was condemned to sin and damnation by the actions of a moment on the part of Adam in the Garden of Eden. *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned, Romans 5:12.*

2] An eternity of regret may follow a moment of madness. Ron Davies spoke of how much he regretted his actions. But regrets, no matter how bitter, cannot cure the consequences of the folly. It took Judas Iscariot only a moment to accept the 30 pieces of silver but, oh what sorrow came in the wake of that action! *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself , Matthew 27:3-5.*

3] One man's moment of madness can bring ruin to many. The family of Ron Davies, his wife and daughter, cannot escape the consequences of his actions. Again, Holy Scripture illustrates this truth. The story of Achan and his moment of madness when he took the "accursed thing" sets it before us. *When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it , Joshua 7:21.* The consequences for his family were dreadful. *And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones , Joshua 7:24*



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There is one moment of madness, the consequences of which are much more far-reaching than the political and personal misery of the likes of Ron Davies. I refer to the madness of rejecting Christ and heaven for sin and damnation. It is that moment when sinners scramble for a pippin and cast away the pearl of greatest price; that moment when they judge it better to pursue the momentary pleasures of sin and turn away from the eternal riches of Christ.

Our text records the details of such a moment. It was in the life of Esau. He, in a moment of madness, chose a short-lived pleasure rather than eternal bliss. He sold his birthright, a central and most important part of which included the blessing of Jehovah with all its temporal and eternal benefits, for one morsel of meat. The story is told for us in Genesis 25:29-34. *And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: and Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he swore unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.*

That final phrase is very important. Esau despised his birthright. Let us consider a little more closely this subject.

I. ESAU'S FOLLY

The sale of his birthright was decided by . . .

1. An undisciplined earthly appetite. I am inclined to think that Esau would have been somewhat spoiled by his father. He would have been indulged and his demands given in to. He certainly acted as a spoiled and defiant son when he took a wife from the Hittites and greatly offended his father and mother, Genesis 26:34-35.

Esau foolishly believed that he must have the pottage or die. He had to have what he desired immediately. Sinners believe that they could not live without a diet of sin. It matters not what God has to say about sin and the consequences it brings, the sinner must indulge his appetites, irrespective of the consequences. How mad is this! This is a diet of death not life. *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*, Romans 6:23. What he desired was legitimate but was permitted to rise in importance above all other considerations.

2. A low evaluation of God's blessing . Esau was a profane person. The word *profane* literally means: *lawful to be trodden on* . His heart was a public pathway. Nothing was forbidden or prohibited. He made no distinction between the clean and the unclean. Any heart that gives a welcome to unclean thoughts will not welcome or value *thoughts of God or eternity*. *We have an illustration of his heart in the parable of the sower. And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up* , Matthew 13:4. A roadway makes poor ground for sowing seed. Even so was Esau's heart.



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3. A hasty decision made without due consideration. Men live and die without thought of God, thinking only of themselves. *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you,* Matthew 6:33. The widow of Zarephath was asked to put God first by Elijah. *And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth ,* 1 Kings 17:13-14. She was required to heed God, trust His promise and give her last meal and that of her child to Elijah. It was well for her that she did. Her last meal became an inexhaustible supply which fed her and her son and the prophet all the days of the famine. Esau, however, acted only on the basis of his immediate needs and ignored the future.

II. ESAU'S CHANGE OF OPINION

His circumstances changed and with them his views of God's blessing.

1. Christ-rejecter, you will not always hold tonight's view of Christ. Everything the sinner holds dear and true today will alter one day. How difficult it is to convey this to an unconverted sinner's mind! *Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. . . . Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter ,* James 5:1,5. The rich man, at whose gate Lazarus the beggar lay, had his riches taken from him and torments took their place. What a change of circumstances awaits the Christ-rejecter who lives solely for the pleasures and riches of today!

2. There is coming a day when you will sense your need of salvation . What terror will overflow the souls of men one day! The dreadful, terrible truth of facing God in your sins will no longer be a mere doctrine, preached by a minister, which at best registered but vaguely on your soul before being casually dismissed. It will become the eternally dreadful condition to which you, sinner, will be consigned by the hand of God's justice. What fear is depicted in the actions of those sinners who are found rejecting Christ when He comes again! *And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?* Rev 6:12-17.

3. You may continue many years without an awareness of your need. It was 40 years after he sold his birthright that Esau realised his error - forty years of prosperity and apparent peace. Forty years in which there was little reason for him to believe that he had made a bad bargain by selling his birthright. You may live long in rejection of Christ with



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little or no sign of what lies ahead of you for all eternity. But be it known to you, the time will come when you will know with all your being that you were wrong to reject Christ.

III. DESPITE HIS EARNESTNESS HE WAS REJECTED

When the time came that Esau would inherit his birthright, he discovered he could not possess it, despite his best efforts at undoing his past decision.

1. He sought. He looked for the blessing that he had before despised. He now had a very strong desire for it.

2. He sought carefully. He was diligent. O how diligent will the careless and indifferent yet be in their seeking of God!

3. He sought it with tears. He weeps now for that which before he smirked at. *And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? . . . Esau despised his birthright,* Genesis 25:32, 34. However, his repentance was not genuine but selfish and shallow. He regretted the sale but not his sin. Not all tears denote true repentance. Not all grief is of that kind which Christ called blessed.

Esau's weeping was but a foretaste of the eternal weeping that lay ahead. Some things cannot be altered no matter how they are regretted. *Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me*, Proverbs 1:28.

In the day that God calls unto the sinner He may be found of those who seek Him earnestly. But He will not be found at any other time.

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon, Isaiah 55:7.