

Don't Sell Your Birthright

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LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo.—“Don't sell your birthright for a bowl of red soup.”

That little allegory might be hard to understand, but it should be a part of our cultural literacy. It's based on a story in the book of Genesis where twin brothers became rivals and vied for supremacy.

In ancient times the older brother was entitled to the family birthright, but in this story the younger brother through savvy and deceit talked the older one in a moment of hunger to give up his birthright for one bowl of red soup.

Jacob and Esau were the two brothers' names, and the account is in Genesis 25:29-34. It reads like this:

“Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. 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,’ 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.”

It is striking that someone could be shortsighted enough to give up the right by inheritance to wealth and position because of the expediency of the moment. I have an immediate physical desire (“Right now I'm tired and hungry”), and I don't have any immediate use for some undefined future bequest (“What is this birthright to me?”), so I'll trade my crown jewels for some immediate gratification.

Is it any wonder that the writer of Hebrews calls Esau profane (Hebrews 12:16, KJV)?

It's tempting to think that no one would be foolish enough to sell one's future for such a pittance, but a nation can also sell its birthright.

Once the world's largest creditor nation, the United States is now the world's largest debtor nation. How did our nation morph from a nation of tremendous productive capacity to one that can't seem to live within its means? How could a nation that was at one time economically self-sufficient become dependent upon nations who hate us and what we stand for?

Do you think this might have something to do with craving a bowl of red soup at the expense of greater things? Is it possible that life's pleasures mean more to people than life's purpose? Is it possible that the ambition of politics and finance leads to the erosion of our national treasure and will?

Is there a bowl of red soup on our national table?