

GENESIS 25:29-34

YOU GOT WHAT YOU WANTED, BUT YOU LOST WHAT YOU HAD!¹

“Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. And Esau said to Jacob, ‘Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!’ (Therefore, his name was called Edom.) Jacob said, ‘Sell me your birthright now.’ Esau said, ‘I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?’ Jacob said, ‘Swear to me now.’ So, he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus, Esau despised his birthright.”²

There was a bull that belonged to a farmer who treated that bull very well. That bull was in a rich pasture with tender grass almost up to his knees. A nice pond with clean, cool water to quench his thirst when he was parched was available for that bull. There were spreading shade trees to shelter that bull from the hot sun during the summer months and to provide a refuge when it rained. He had six heifer cows sharing his pasture. That bull had everything a bull could want. Surely, this was a happy bull.

But, the bull was unhappy. He could see another pasture across the road; and in that pasture he could see three cows. Understand, this bull had everything a bull could want. Nevertheless, he felt he had to somehow get into that distant pasture. One day, the bull decided that he just had to try to find a way to get out of his own pasture and into that other pasture where he could see those other cows. Day-by-day, he gazed across the fences that kept him from what he wanted. As time passed, he measured the first fence, eyeing it up and down and estimating how he could get across that fence. One day, the bull gathered up his strength and his courage; he began to run as hard as he could run toward the fence that kept him in his beautiful prison. As he neared that fence, he jumped as hard as he could and almost cleared that fence, but he caught his underside on the fence and cut himself badly. He was torn up something terrible.

Having made it across one fence, the bull realised there was still another fence to get over if he was to get with those three cows. Well, he had made it over one fence; he’d just have to make another run to get over that next fence. So, again gathering his courage and running with all his might toward that fence he jumped at the last minute. He almost made it over unscathed, but he cut himself again, adding to the damage already sustained to his undercarriage.

Nevertheless, he was in the pasture with those three cows. As he staggered toward those cows, he noticed that they were bulls. ***He got what he wanted, but he lost what he had.***

Throughout our world, and especially among the churches of our Lord, are people of whom we could say, “You got what he wanted; but you lost what he had.” There are wives who decided that the handsome prince they married isn’t all that handsome after all. He uses Old Spice instead of wearing Boss, and she doesn’t like Old Spice. He prefers Wranglers to Armani. He is happy driving an F150 rather than a Lexus. She wants someone who appreciates the finer things of life. Watch out, woman; you may get what you want and lose what you had.

¹ I am pleased to acknowledge that the title for this message and the concept were appropriated from a sermon preached by Rev. B. W. Smith, “You Got What You Wanted But Lost What You Had,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BuV7Tg0aVbI>, accessed 14 February 2018

² Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

There are men who have grown dissatisfied with their wife. After three children, he grouses that she no longer has a twenty-six-inch waist and she is often exhausted after a day of caring for the children. It isn't so much that she doesn't appreciate dressing nicely, but it is hard to look as if you've stepped out of a fashion magazine when the baby has just spit up on your shoulder and the smell of sour milk overpowers the aroma of Obsession. She cooks his meals, makes sure that he always has clean clothes and keeps the house clean, but he imagines that he deserves someone better for himself. Man, I'm warning you to be careful or you will get what you want and lose what you had.

Legion are the young people who decided they wanted it all—right now! They were enrolled in school, but all that studying just wasn't getting them what they wanted. They knew they were smarter than the teachers; they'd just quit school and go get a job. That minimum wage was more attractive than earning nothing while going to school for six hours a day. Tragically, there will come a day when they are grown and responsible for a family. They will still be working for a low wage, holding down two jobs and unlikely to ever rise much above where they are now. Listen, young people, you may get what you want, and lose what you have.

It never ceases to amaze me at how different things look after we leave home. Nothing motivates reconsidering life choices like opening the fridge and discovering there is a slice of pizza left from three-days ago, a half-empty jar of sweet relish and a bottle of water. Young people are quickly sobered when they can no longer stand in a hot shower for thirty minutes at a time, because they don't have enough money for the gas bill this month. Flipping the light switch and having nothing happen is a sobering experience when you've been accustomed to leaving a trail of lights burning as you wandered through the house for all those years. Washing your own clothes rather than merely leaving them on the floor for mom is a great means of instruction. Not being able to access the Internet because you don't have the money to pay your cellular bill one month makes some decisions appear rather hasty. Young man, young woman, be careful or you might get what you want, and lose what you had.

The Word of God is full of stories that speak of people who got what they wanted, but they lost what they had. If we are wise, we will learn from what is written in the Word of God. Let's consider a man who got what he wanted but lost what he had. That man in question was named Esau. Esau was the firstborn son of Isaac. Because of his position as the firstborn, he had the right of the birthright. We may not appreciate the significance of this position in this day, but the birthright ensured that the firstborn child held authority in the family second only to the father. The birthright would ensure that the firstborn would succeed his father as head of the family. To hold the birthright would mean honour throughout the generations for the firstborn son. The birthright meant not only authority, but it ensured a double portion as an inheritance for the firstborn son. Let's study this biblical account so that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

I'LL GLADLY GIVE YOU MY BIRTHRIGHT TOMORROW FOR A BOWL OF RED BEANS TODAY. I confess—I love cartoons. Whether this is a weakness or not, I'll let you decide; nevertheless, I love cartoons. This is especially true of older cartoons that actually attempted to be funny without resorting to discussions of bodily functions. Perhaps some of you, especially if you are of a certain age, will recall a character named Wimpy that was a regular character in Popeye cartoons. If you recall Wimpy, then you will know that the line for which he was remembered was, "I'd gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today." Wimpy was always trying to con someone into feeding him for free. Perhaps that was the situation for Esau, or more likely, in light of the view presented in the Word of God, we witness a man who despised his birthright.

Esau appears to have been what we might say was a man's man. He was a hunter, a Bowman, practised in the art of hunting. The Word of God says that "Esau was a skilled hunter" [GENESIS 25:27]; apparently, he was an accomplished outdoorsman. However, any hunter can tell you that there is a great difference between hunting and harvesting. Often, when returning from an unsuccessful hunt, hunters will say, "This is why it is called hunting." Animals don't always co-operate, and any particular hunt can prove arduous. That appears to have been the case on the particular day that is described in the text. Esau had spent time in the field, and he had either exhausted his food during the pursuit or he hadn't wanted to alert game to his presence by lighting a fire so he could cook or by giving away his presence through eating something.

Esau had spent time in the field, whether a day or whether several days, we are not told. What we are told is that when he returned from this particular hunt, he was hungry. Actually, the word is translated in this particular text by our English term "exhausted." That he was hungry is apparent, however. When this Hebrew word is used to describe Gideon's men as they pursued the Midianites, it is translated "exhausted," just as it is in our text; however, the context clearly speaks of the hunger these men experienced. This is the particular account in question. "Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over, he and the 300 men who were with him, exhausted yet pursuing. So, he said to the men of Succoth, 'Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian'" [JUDGES 8:4, 5]. The men were exhausted because they were hungry from pursuing the enemy without stopping. Gideon's request was for a little bread to relieve the hunger of his exhausted men, thereby reviving their flagging energies.

Elsewhere, the term is translated "faint," though the context speaks of hunger or of thirst [see ISAIAH 29:8]. The word is translated "parched" [see PSALM 143:6] and elsewhere it is "thirsty" [see PROVERBS 25:25]. The text for this day makes it plain that Esau was hungry, but it is extremely doubtful that he was about to die of starvation. However, in order to assuage his hunger (which was temporary), he surrendered his birthright (which was permanent). An old saying in the southland warns, "Don't sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the temporary." Esau's choice was significant; it set the direction his life would move ever after. The same is true of us when we make choices. Daily, we make choices that potentially fix our lives. The choices you make today may well fix your future. The bent of your life is being determined by the choices you are making today.

Jacob was shrewd, there is no argument about that. He recognised the significance of the birthright, and he seized the opportunity to secure that position for himself. You will remember that because Esau was born moments before his twin, Jacob, he received the right of primogeniture. Jacob was born moments later; but Esau was the firstborn [see GENESIS 25:24-26].

Why should the birthright matter? The firstborn son enjoyed special privileges by right of birth. Among these privileges were: *consecration to the Lord* [see EXODUS 22:29]; *family dignity* [see GENESIS 49:3]; *a double portion of the father's estate* [see DEUTERONOMY 21:17]; and, in the royal families, *succession to the Kingdom* [see 2 CHRONICLES 21:3]. Since primogeniture entailed religious privilege, Esau, in renouncing his birthright, proved himself to be unholy.

What would you give in exchange for your character? When I was growing up, my dad often told me that it was essential that I be a man of character. One of the highest compliments that he could give for any man, and a compliment that was applied to him on multiple occasions, was, "His word is his bond." When Don Stark gave his word, it was as good as gold. That was a day in which banks would lend money on the strength of a man's word. My first school loan was given on my signature because I was Don Stark's boy, and Don raised his boys right.

What is the price of your character? Let me speak pointedly to our younger members for a moment. Plain talk is not always esteemed in the churches, though the world is coarse, crass and crude, and plain speech is accepted when it is coming from this dying world. Without degenerating into vulgarity, I am nevertheless compelled to strive for clarity so there will be no misunderstanding concerning what I am about to say.

Allow me first to address the young women who may hear what I am saying today. Young woman, you know that your moral purity, your virginity, is all that you really have to offer in the final analysis. Why would you exchange your character for one tawdry moment? Do you actually think that you will get love by giving away your purity? Surely, that is too high a price for your virtue! A lifetime stretches before you; don't spoil your future by filling your life with choices today that can only lead to regret.

It is no less important that young men understand their obligation to maintain purity. Young man, has no one told you that character is paramount? When did we cease declaring the message to young men that their virginity was a gift to be held in reserve for their wife? Young men need to learn to be protectors, using their strength to show respect to women and to protect any person who may be weaker or who is vulnerable. Whoever convinced young men that exchanging purity for a moment of sweaty pleasure was a good or wise exchange? Young men are selling themselves too cheaply! Young man, you will make plenty of choices that you will regret as the years pass; don't add to that litany of regret by making foolish choices now.

As I was working on this message, I read an article published by a major news site. What was said in that article is germane to the message for this day. It addressed the pressure placed on the youth of this day to be sexually active, and it addressed the loss of satisfaction that occurs when men and women surrender to this new/old pressure. The author wrote, "It's not an exaggeration to say the entire process of dating—getting excited about someone you meet and letting him or her know via flirtation, waiting for the man to make the first move and then the woman accepts and the two go out somewhere for the evening—is gone. Gone. Instead, young people text each other to come over and 'hang out.' Then they get naked.

"Relationships and marriage is probably one of the most important things you're going to do in your life, right? But people don't spend any time doing anything about it,' notes Chris Donahue, [a producer of the film, 'The Dating Project.']

"Young people are no longer groomed for marriage, which is essentially what dating is (or was): a necessary selection process for the purpose of making a final choice in a mate. With that process gone, young people are lost. They forge ahead with the sex because that part's easy. But love eludes them."³

In the rush to get what they want, neither boys nor girls get what they want. Both are disappointed and dissatisfied. The author of this article, and the producers of the aforementioned film, noted three flawed ideas that drive the modern rush to be sexually active.

- 1. For women, being sexually "liberated" and obsessively self-reliant is better than being emotionally attached to a man.**
- 2. Casual sex is both normal and good.**
- 3. You deserve the *best*. Never settle.⁴**

³ Suzanne Venker, "Dating 101: Film takes aim at America's hookup culture and the death of courtship," Fox News, April 2, 2018, <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2018/04/02/dating-101-film-takes-aim-at-america-s-hookup-culture-and-death-courtship.html>, accessed 2 April 2018

⁴ Ibid.

At best these concepts are seriously flawed; they ignore centuries of cultural stability that has been moulded by and guided by biblical understanding. The writer concludes by noting, “All of these narratives—combined with social media, the decline in religion, rampant divorce and a transient lifestyle—keep love at bay. They are largely to blame for why more than 50 percent of America is single.”⁵ In short, youth—known for being driven by emotion rather than the ability to realise consequences—got what they wanted but they lost what they had.

Just as youth are driven to exchange the permanent on the altar of the temporary, so it holds equally true for those who are older. The direction of life is set early for our life pilgrimage, and many adults never turn from making foolish choices. As is true for youth in today’s world, so adults are pushed by social pressure to make hasty, ill-advised decision. The social pressure to succeed, as defined by a commercialised society, exerts undue pressure on people to choose what appears to offer the greatest possibility for wealth over stability and development of character for individuals and for families. Where we will live and the work we will perform are chosen without thought of consequences for the family. Churches we will attend are selected on the basis of who is there rather than whether God is honoured by what is taught and what is believed and practised. Friendships are made dependent on the feelings of the moment rather than the impact on our lives in the course of years.

THE HIGH COST OF A RASH DECISION — Among the Proverbs is one which warns,

“The borrower is the slave of the lender.”

[PROVERBS 22:7b]

Almost inevitably, this Proverb would be considered to be a caution against borrowing money. However, I suggest there is much wider application—don’t borrow trouble through rash choices. This is precisely what Esau did. He gave no thought to the value of what he had; therefore, he was willing to exchange it for immediate gratification. Something like that occurs in the life of far too many people in this day. We become so focused on immediate gratification that we fail to count the cost of the choice we are making.

Perhaps you will recall a statement the Master made on one occasion when great crowds were accompanying Him. Jesus spoke to each of us when He said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

“Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear” [LUKE 14:26-35].

⁵ Ibid.

Though not implicitly stated, Jesus' words challenge any who would consider following Him to contemplate the cost of not following Him, just as they must consider the cost of following Him. Whether choosing to follow Him or making another choice, weigh the cost before you act—don't go into His service blindly; and don't make major decisions without weighing the cost. It is of little moment whether we are speaking of a young man or a young woman thinking of gratifying their own desire or whether we are speaking of a parent who is trying to justify what some think of as a mundane act such as cheating on taxes, there is always a cost associated with your choice. Are you willing to pay that price for the choice you are about to make? The Word of God makes plain the cost of doing what is right, just as that same Word warns of the high cost that will be exacted when doing wrong.

In the Book of Hebrews is a startling statement that reads, "See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears" [HEBREWS 12:15-17]. God saw Esau's action as "unholy." Through his choice, Esau cultivated a "root of bitterness," which defiled his life.

The concept of the "birthright" and especially the "blessing" is not important in our culture. That is a shame. Perhaps the birthright has faded in importance, since we usually ensure that our children share equally in the inheritance, but the loss of the blessing is a shame in our culture. There is something wonderful in the concept that a father should bless his children before he exits this life. What a powerful testimony should each father determine that there will be a time in later life when he calls his children to himself, successively places his hand on each head, pronouncing a blessing on each child.

Do you remember how Esau's choice played out? Let's read a little farther to ensure that we remember the details of his choice. The twenty-seventh chapter of the Book of Genesis begins, "When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son and said to him, 'My son;' and he answered, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me, and prepare for me delicious food, such as I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die'" [GENESIS 27:1-4].

This conversation wasn't nearly as private as Isaac had thought. Listening discretely was Rebekah. Perhaps you remember a statement made of home life after the birth of these twins? "When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob" [GENESIS 25:27, 28]. Both mother and father had favourites. Isaac favoured Esau and Rebekah favoured Jacob. Perhaps Isaac loved Esau because he was firstborn, if only by a matter of minutes. Esau would receive the birthright; he would be blessed as the firstborn; that knowledge made Isaac happy.

When Rebekah heard Isaac's plan, she immediately formulated a plan and hurried to prepare her "favourite son." "I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, 'Bring me game and prepare for me delicious food, that I may eat it and bless you before the LORD before I die.' Now therefore, my son, obey my voice as I command you. Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, so that I may prepare from them delicious food for your father, such as he loves. And you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies" [GENESIS 27:6-10].

Jacob may have been a “Mama’s boy,” but he was no fool. He immediately recognised the danger inherent in his mother’s plot against his older brother and his father. “Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing” [GENESIS 27:11, 12].

“Not to worry,” responded Rebekah, “leave it with me.” Actually, she was Jewish, so she accepted the responsibility of the plan and said she would receive any curse on herself. “Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, bring them to me” [GENESIS 27:13].

So, the schemer and his scheming mother prepared a goat, knowing that the meat would taste gamey, likely fooling the old man into thinking he was eating wild game. Jacob would wear some of his brother’s clothes, which would still have the earthy aroma picked up from his tramping in the field, and he would put a piece of goat skin on his forearm so his arm would feel hairy should his father touch him. Rebekah prepared the meat and Jacob, no doubt with considerable trepidation, approached his father with the meat and some bread.

Isaac appears to have had some reservation, since he asked Jacob to come near so he could verify who it was. Perhaps the voice didn’t sound quite right. Perhaps Jacob hesitated rather than acting with verve and determination. Something wasn’t quite right. Nevertheless, Isaac was at last satisfied that it was his son, Esau, who was presenting him with the meal. After he had eaten and drunk some wine, he called his son close, kissed him, smelling the scent of the field, and then he blessed his son, assuming that he was blessing Esau.

In the meanwhile, Esau came in from the field, prepared a meal and approached Isaac. Isaac realised that he had been duped and Esau raged because Jacob had “stolen” his birthright and his blessing. Esau complained that Jacob had stolen what was rightfully his! However, he conveniently forgot that day when he traded his birthright!

What isn’t necessarily apparent is the LORD’s involvement in these matters. Malachi reveals God’s view of what was taking place when he writes of these events, “‘I have loved you,’ says the LORD. But you say, ‘How have you loved us?’ ‘Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ declares the LORD. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert’” [MALACHI 1:2, 3]. What Malachi doesn’t say in these verses is why God should hate Esau.

A few moments ago, I cited what was written in the Hebrew Letter. Refresh your memory by hearing again what was written there. “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears” [HEBREWS 12:15-17].

Through his disdain for that which was holy, Esau demonstrated that he was unholy. When it became apparent that he would not receive what he saw as his right, he was devastated. He begged. He pleaded. He raged. However, his sudden conversion was too late—the birthright had already been given to Jacob together with the blessing that accompanied the birthright. Though Isaac loved Esau and wanted to bless him, his blessing would be inferior to that which was given Jacob.

God was guiding affairs. This does not excuse for Rebekah’s and Jacob’s manipulation; rather, it is an acknowledgement that behind our lives is the unseen, guiding hand of the Living God ensuring that His will shall be accomplished. The knowledge that God was directing events does not excuse Esau’s lack of holiness or his casual disdain for what was holy; it merely acknowledges that our choices have consequences. Know that our choices have consequences.

ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND ESAU? How different history might have been had Esau made a different choice when he was hungry. Of course, that is true throughout all of history, isn't it? How different history might have been had any of a number of choices been different. As I was preparing this message, I came upon a news report that related some major frustrations of modern feminists. As result of the insistence that things be equal, the report detailed how women are now paying alimony—and they are upset about it!⁶ It is one example of what has come to be known as “The Law of Unintended Consequences.”

During the past fifty years or more, liberal scientists have warned of a population crisis. Coupled with these warnings was an emphasis on abortion. The intent of these policies was to permit accumulation of increased personal wealth, greater recreational time while simultaneously reducing world population. The efforts have been more successful than many advocates could have imagined. The impact is that birthrates for many nations, Canada included, are disastrously low and nations are forced to increase immigration to pay for the social benefits people have come to expect. This need accounts for the waves of Muslim immigration flooding Germany, Sweden and France, with the attendant cultural clashes that have become so common. Russia has responded to the population crisis by offering bonuses to families who have babies, and even sets aside “Fertility Days.” Similar ideas have been tested in Denmark, Italy, France.⁷

Another example comes from the world of computers. Companies instituted password policies requiring the use of mixed case, special characters, numbers, not varying old passwords, etc. Passwords that follow these rules are theoretically more secure. However, people can't remember these multiple and complex passwords; so, they write them down or store them in a text file, both of which are less secure than letting the user pick a password he can remember.

More recently, we had the example of Parkland kids, students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. After the tragic shooting of students at that school, some of the youth were promoted by CNN and various anti-gun organisations as the face of school safety. These students wanted what they called “common sense” gun laws implemented, laws that were, in effect, gun bans. Other more politically connected individuals argued for the need for more immediate safety measures, such as clear backpacks, increased school safety officers and metal detectors. These measures could be instituted immediately, and they were! Now students are complaining because they must sacrifice freedom for safety.⁸

One final example, the “cobra effect,”⁹ will suffice. The British colonial government in India was concerned about the number of venomous cobras in Delhi. They offered a bounty for every dead cobra. Initially this was a successful strategy as large numbers of snakes were killed for the reward. Eventually, however, enterprising individuals began to breed cobras for the income. When the government became aware of this, the reward program was scrapped, causing the cobra breeders to set free the now-worthless snakes. As a result, the wild cobra population further increased. The apparent solution for the problem made the situation even worse.

⁶ “Men Are Receiving Alimony And THEIR EX WIVES ARE UPSET ABOUT IT!!!!”, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ct0coD722zE>, accessed 6 April 2018

⁷ Naomi Schaefer Riley, “How Far Should Government Go to Encourage Couples to Reproduce?”, Institute for Family Studies, February 28, 2017, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/how-far-should-government-go-to-encourage-couples-to-reproduce/>, accessed 7 April 2018; “The Falling Fertility of Europe,” Rickety, January 16, 2009, <http://www.rickety.us/2009/01/the-falling-fertility-of-europe/>, accessed 7 April 2018

⁸ Nicole Darrah, “Stoneman Douglas students must now use clear backpacks,” New York Post, April 2, 2018, <https://nypost.com/2018/04/02/stoneman-douglas-students-must-now-use-clear-backpacks/>, accessed 2 April 2018

⁹ “Cobra effect,” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cobra_effect, accessed 7 April 2018

I've listed examples of people, even examples of nations, who got what they wanted and lost what they had. The Word of God is replete with examples of individuals who thought they knew what they wanted and were willing to exchange what they had in order to get what they wanted. Listen, young man, young woman, I understand that you think that you have all the answers at sixteen, at twenty-one or even at twenty-six. You need to know that these older folks who share this world with you once felt the same way, but they have experience on their side. Time tempers rashness, and you don't have time on your side at this point. Watch out! You may get what you want and lose what you have.

Judas wanted money, and perhaps he wanted recognition. Religious leaders gave him thirty pieces of silver to betray the Master. He got what he wanted, but he lost what he had. Judas sacrificed the opportunity to serve the Master, the opportunity to be great in the eyes of the Lord; the opportunity to do something great that would have an impact for good in the world. Judas surrendered the knowledge that he had served in the presence of awesome power. Judas had seen Jesus satisfy a wedding party in need of refreshment and save the bride and groom from crushing embarrassment. He had witnessed Jesus use a little boy's lunch to feed five thousand. He had seen the Master raise the dead, restore shrunken arms and legs, give sight to the blind and restore hearing to the deaf. Judas jettisoned everything that was great and noble for nothing. Ultimately, this despicable, craven excuse for a man hanged himself. I'm talking to some fathers; I'm talking to some mothers. I'm warning some young men and young women. Hear me—Judas got what he wanted, but he lost what he had.

Jesus told a story of two brothers. The younger of those two brothers demanded his inheritance while his father was still very much alive. He wanted what he wanted, and he wanted it right now; he didn't have time to mature, time to grow up, time to prepare for life. That young man got what he wanted, but he lost what he had. When he came to his senses, he had spent everything he had and was forced to tend pigs. He was so hungry that he was prepared to fight pigs for something to eat. He was ready to go home and become a servant to his father. Yes, this boy got what he wanted, but he lost what he had.

David saw a young woman bathing herself and rather than looking away, his gaze lingered. He formulated a plan, ordering that she be brought to him. Before long, the king had seduced that young woman; soon after, she announced that she was pregnant. I'm not suggesting that Bathsheba was without responsibility—she did willingly enter into the effort to deceive her husband. Fear makes us do stupid things, as does illicit desire. David got what he wanted, but the price was far greater than he could have bargained for. David lost one of his mighty men. Ever after he would bear the mark of Cain, knowing in his heart that he had taken a good man's life. He surrendered intimacy with the Lord God and gave up stature in the eyes of God's people. His kingdom was threatened, and it cost him the life of several of his children. David got what he wanted, but he lost what he had. There are husbands and wives here who know what I'm talking about. Be careful; you may get what you want and lose what you have.

Samson wanted personal gratification, and it cost him far more than he could have imagined. He laid his head in Delilah's lap, and she cut his locks. Soon, his desire would cost him his freedom, his eyesight, his dignity, his life. He got what he wanted, but he lost what he had. Samson wanted revenge on his enemies, and he pulled down a temple filled with those who hated him. He got what he wanted, but he lost what he had. I'm talking to young people now. Watch out young man, you may get what you want and lose what you have. Young woman, think carefully before you act; you may get what you want and lose what you have.

Those paragons of philosophy, The Rolling Stones, sang,

You can't always get what you want
You can't always get what you want
You can't always get what you want
But if you try sometimes well you just might find
You get what you need¹⁰

“If you try sometimes, well, you just might find you get what you need.” There is truth in those words. Perhaps we need to hear that what we must strive for is what honours God—that is what we need. Regardless of the challenge we are facing, it is time to encourage one another to ask, “What is the Lord’s will in this instance?”

Throughout this message, I’ve endeavoured to be practical. I understand that I’m not the most polished speaker. As a rhetorician, I leave much to be desired. Nevertheless, I am aware of the pressures facing our youth to conform to the world in which they live. Holiness, purity of life, are concepts that find scant support in our world. Youth are inundated with messages tearing away any foundations that would equip one for godliness. I know from hard experience the pressure to succeed that drives families to make decisions concerning work, decisions concerning education, decisions concerning lifestyle and how these decisions can drive out any consideration of serving God if we are not careful. I urge each of you to heed this caution that you don’t get what you want and lose what you have.

You’ve advanced in knowledge of the Living God and of His will. You now serve Him. If you are not deliberate in the choices you make, you can fall away from productive service without even being aware that you have slipped. If you do not guard your heart, you can cease to glorify the Master without even knowing that you no longer bring glory to His Name. The Master taught His disciples, “Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” [MATTHEW 6:25-33].

The message concludes with a call for you who hear to determine whether you will pursue your own will, or whether you will seek God’s will. Ensure that when you get what you want, that it is what the Lord wants for you. Amen.

¹⁰ Keith Richards and Mick Jagger, “You can’t always get what you want,” © Abkco Music, Inc.