

THE NICOLAITANS - THE PROFILE OF ESAU

Peter Hay, Presbytery Word for week commencing Sunday 24 August 2025
Transcription of recording, slightly edited

Welcome everyone to the Bible School this afternoon. I am going to take the first session. Our subject this afternoon (and across the weekend) will be the Nicolaitans, and we will be looking particularly at Esau. This group of people was first identified as an influence in the church in Jesus' letter to the Ephesians. This is Revelation chapter 2 verse 6. This is Jesus' first letter, and He wrote, 'But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.' Jesus also rebuked the presbytery in Pergamum in relation to the Nicolaitans. He commended the presbytery in Ephesus because they hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Then Jesus, in His third letter (this is the letter to Pergamum) rebuked them. This is Revelation chapter 2 verses 15 to 16: 'You also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans... [In Ephesus, they hated the *deeds* of the Nicolaitans. Now the Lord is addressing Pergamum because they have those among them who hold to the *doctrine* of the Nicolaitans] ... which thing I hate.' He said, 'Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.' The way to deal with the Nicolaitan problem is through the ministry of the word, which is proceeding from the mouth of Christ as a sword.

This group called the Nicolaitans: the key to understanding who they are is the fact that Jesus hated their doctrine. When He is talking about their *doctrine*, it is what they believe; the basis of their conversation; and He hated their *deeds* — the way that they lived. He is hating something about this group of people. This is the very same hatred that Jesus, the Lord, had for Esau. This is Malachi chapter 1 and verses 2 to 3: '“Was not Esau Jacob's brother?” says the Lord, “yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness.”'

The Lord hated those who were profiled as Nicolaitan within the community of the church (or lampstand churches) because they displayed the same attitude and demeanour that Esau and his descendants displayed. If you want to know who the Nicolaitans are, they have the same profile as Esau. The Lord hated the deeds and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, and this is the same

hatred or focus that the Lord had for Esau. It still does not quite describe or explain who the Nicolaitans are among the church, but the key to understanding who they are among us is in Malachi's question, 'Was not Esau Jacob's brother?' This is the key to understanding who the Nicolaitans are.

We know that Esau and Jacob were twins, and they were born (both of them) into a covenant house. They were heirs of the promise made to Abraham and their father Isaac, and they received the word defining their name as sons of God. We are talking about people who are Christians - identifying as Christians and having been born of God. But something goes amiss that results in a belief system and a mode of engagement in the community of the church which Jesus hates. They were heirs of the promise made to Abraham and their father Isaac and had received the word defining their name as sons of God. That word (this is Genesis 25 verse 23) was, '...one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.' The older was Esau. He was the first one who was born, and his predestination was to be a servant of Jacob.

The Nicolaitans are people in the church who are heirs of salvation, but they reject the word of their name and refuse to be yoked to Christ and serve under His authority. This is exercised in a church through a star presbytery in the right hand of Christ. The right hand of Christ is the place of His authority, and that is where the word is proceeding from. That is who the Nicolaitans are. Paul wrote about the Nicolaitans, their profile being described by Esau's behaviour. This is in Hebrews chapter 12 verses 14 to 17. It says, 'Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord... [This is talking about in terms of obtaining the blessing of a resurrection body]... looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator [that means immoral person] or profane [which means godless] person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward [after he despised

his birthright], when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance... [The repentance actually belonged to the rejection of the birthright. He did not find any repentance in relation to his rejection of the birthright, so it meant he could never obtain the blessing.] ... for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.'

The principal characteristic (drawing from this passage) of a person like Esau, nominated by Christ as having the profile of the Nicolaitans is that they fall short of the grace of God. 'Falling short of the grace of God' does not just mean that you are always struggling in terms of life being too hard for you. What falling short of the grace of God means is that you find no rest for your soul because you do not fear the Lord and you reject His yoke upon you. That is what it means to fall short of the grace of God. It is an absence of the fear of the Lord and an unwillingness to take Christ's yoke upon us. Establishing this point about falling short of the grace of God, Hebrews chapter 4 verses 1 and 2 says, 'Therefore, since a promise remains of entering rest [Falling short of the grace of God is not finding rest], let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.' That would be falling short of the grace of God. We have just read that '...looking carefully, lest anyone fall short of the grace of God...' Now we are reading, '...since there remains a promise of entering His rest, let us fear, [fear the Lord] lest any of you seem to come short of it.' Then we are reading Matthew 11 verses 28 to 30, 'Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden [or we can say, 'who are weary'], and I will give you rest.' There is a promise of entering rest and you can fall short of it, which means falling short of the grace of God. 'Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.' The question would be: how do we get yoked to Christ, so we do not fall short of the grace of God, which means not entering rest?

We read in Hebrews 4 verses 14 to 16, 'Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise

with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.'

A person who is weary and heavy laden is falling short of the grace of God; but they can enter rest if they get yoked to Christ. This is a person who is weary. The amazing point is that Jesus is fully acquainted with this weariness - this weakness. That is a beautiful thought. We have a High Priest who is not unacquainted with this condition. He 'was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin'. Knowing this, verse 16, 'Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy... [Mercy is a person who knows that they are under judgement. If you know you are under judgement, then you are a delighter in mercy] ... let us obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.' Now that 'help in time of need' should be translated, 'obtain grace to bind us (or yoke us) to Christ in time of need'. To fall short of the grace of God is to reject the yoke of Christ, because you do not want to learn from Him. That weariness leads to a belief system and a form of conduct like Esau's.

God's grace yokes us to Christ from whom we learn our obedience as sons of God. Our soul is at rest. What does it mean for your soul to be at rest? It means that you are free from agitation, from discontent, from suspicion, from mind chatter and from weariness. Would you say that a restless person is all those things? God's grace yokes us to Christ from whom we learn our obedience. Our soul is at rest as we receive and embrace the word of our predestination. We cease from striving to make a name for ourselves, and by love are able to serve one another under the authority of Christ in the church. Disobedience to this word (which is proceeding from the right hand of Christ and defines God's will for our life) incurs the wrath of God. His wrath is the expression of the loathing or hatred that He had for Esau and Esau's descendants (or the wrath upon the Nicolaitans).

This is what He said about His own special people whom He delivered out of Egypt but who would not enter into the Promised Land (which is a symbol of rest). This is Psalm 95 verses 10 to 11: 'For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, "It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways." So, I swore in [My anger] My wrath [My hatred

for those who hate My way], “They shall not enter My rest.” ’ We know these people hated His way because they kept going another way. ‘I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest.’ Rest is absolutely fundamental to the inheritance that belongs to Jacob - to those who choose the yoke of Christ.

When we fall short of God’s grace and remain restless, a root of bitterness begins to take root in our heart. I want to make the point that all of us at times stumble. We all have a bad day. We all fall. In fact, the righteous fall seven times in a day. We are not talking fundamentally about those who have a stumble or have the odd gripe. We are talking about those who, when they are weary (like Esau was when he came and wanted a bowl of stew), willingly give up their birthright and find some compensation or another way that leads to an entrenched behaviour that grows and becomes a root of bitterness in them. I am not saying, ‘Do not ever have a bad day.’ I am saying, ‘What do you do when you are stumbling? Do you take Christ’s yoke upon you and learn from Him or are you unwilling to submit yourself and humble yourself under that yoke?’ This is the place of faith. This is the place of choice. I am asking you, ‘What do you do with your choice?’

When we fall short of God’s grace and remain restless, we are a person not finding rest for our soul - full of agitation, discontent, complaint, whatever. A root of bitterness begins to take root in our heart. The ground of our heart bears the fruit of thorns and briars, which is manifest in the way that we *talk* and *conduct* ourselves. Our speech becomes what we believe, and our conduct becomes our deeds. This is the *doctrine* and the *deeds* of the Nicolaitans. It is the fruit of a root of bitterness. Paul said that those who have this growing up in them are ‘rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned’. That is Hebrews 6 verse 8.

This root of bitterness belongs to the spirit of antichrist that is manifested by those who go out from the church and then seek to justify themselves by persecuting the church. We have Esau: he has a profile among lampstand churches that looks like a Nicolaitan expression. That Nicolaitan expression (if a person finds no place of repentance) becomes a spirit of antichrist

within the church, which then goes out from among us and persecutes the church.

The beginning point of Esau’s decline (remembering that he is the picture of this Nicolaitan profile) was despising the birthright. It is important to remember that Esau did not begin being hated by God. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Esau began with a silver spoon in his mouth. He was part of a covenant house. He was a son of God, and he was a citizen by right of a heavenly city that was yet to come. That is awesome. He did not start being hated by God. He started with everything belonging to him. That is a birthright. He was an heir of salvation. That is what belonged to him. That was predestined for him. Esau’s departure from God’s predestination for him first became apparent through his disregard for the birthright.

Let us read this occasion where Esau defaulted in relation to this amazing inheritance that belonged to him, because this is the issue that the Lord is speaking to us about as well, in relation to the Nicolaitan matter. This is Genesis chapter 25 and verses 29 to 34. This is the most classic story really. Every sonseeker knows this story, because everyone cannot believe that someone would give up anything for a bowl of lentil stew.

‘Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary [‘Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy laden.’ We have a son of God who is a bit weary. Verse 30]. And Esau said to Jacob, “Please feed me with that same red stew; for I am weary... [It is interesting that he acknowledged his weariness. You hear that comment every now and then. ‘I am feeling absolutely sick and tired of this.’ ‘Why do we have to keep hearing this?’ ‘It drives me nuts doing this.’ This is weariness. If that is coming out of your mouth, can I suggest that your weariness is the evidence of God’s judgement?] ...for I am weary.” Therefore his name was called Edom. [We are going to come to his name in a minute.] But Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright as of this day.” And Esau said, “Look, I am about to die here; so what is this birthright to me?” Then Jacob said, “Swear to me as of this day.” So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils;

then he ate and drank, arose, and went his own way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.'

Esau's contempt for his birthright, and his unrepentance in relation to this response, were fundamental to his inability to inherit the blessing. What is the difference between the birthright and the blessing? This should be very helpful. We are going to develop this a fair bit as we get closer to the NBS.

The birthright refers to what we receive from God through His initiative to us. Esau was a son of God. He was in a covenant house. He was a citizen of a heavenly city (in type), and he did nothing to deserve that; it was all given to him. It is a *birthright*. That is, we are established in the adoption as sons, born of God, made citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. I am talking about *our* birthright now. Paul called the city of which we are citizens, the 'church of the firstborn'. The birthright belongs to the firstborn. This is what belongs to those who are citizens of this city.

The *blessing* is our unique participation in the life and culture of Yahweh's house as partakers of Their divine nature. This is you, having received this birthright; that is you abiding in Them. This is the action of faith to join Them. As we walk faithfully in the fellowship of this offering as part of the community of Christ, this blessing is progressively obtained and fully realised on the day of resurrection when we receive an immortal, incorruptible spiritual body, having been made in the image and likeness of God. The *birthright* is what is coming to you. The *blessing* is what you are obtaining as you are coming into and abiding in God. Obtaining this blessing depends on how we live and walk on the pathway of salvation.

A key characteristic of a person who despises their birthright is their response to *suffering*. If you want to know what it looks like for us to despise our birthright, it is evident in our orientation and response to suffering. In the first instance, we do not recognise that our weariness and sickness and resistance to the word of the Lord proclaimed by His messengers is the fruit of our carnal orientation to life and the community of the church. If you want to know what it looks like to despise your birthright, it first looks like how you respond to life when you are suffering? Now the first element of suffering

is our lack of recognition (or acknowledgement) that our weariness ('I am sick of this', our sin-sickness, and our resistance to the word of the Lord proclaimed by His messengers) is the fruit of our carnal orientation to life in the community of the church and is under judgement.

I am reading from 1 Corinthians chapter 11. This is people who are becoming weak and sick and falling asleep under the judgement of God - not discerning their obedience in the body. There is always a reason for people's condition, which is often as the victim of their circumstances, or they are the victims of others. Because they do not acknowledge that their weariness is the judgement of God, they acknowledge that they are weary. But instead of saying, 'I am weary, I need to take Christ's yoke upon me,' they say, 'I am weary, and it is everybody else's fault.' Because of that, they are unwilling to turn and take Christ's yoke upon them, whereupon they would be able to embrace their sufferings as a participation in Christ's death, burial and resurrection. That would be taking Christ's yoke upon them, learning from Him and walking with Him.

This is what Paul said about despising chastening or the orientation to suffering. This is Hebrews 12 verses 5 to 9: 'And you have forgotten the exhortation that speaks to you as sons...' Who is pressing this exhortation on us? It is the Holy Spirit Himself, bringing the conviction, 'You can be a son of God.' Do not forget the exhortation. The Spirit's work, as our Helper, is to bring to our remembrance this very point. 'You have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as sons. My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord.' So Esau despised his birthright. We are not to despise the chastening of the Lord. Why? 'For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives [everyone who has a birthright].'

If you are despising the chastening of the Lord, you are despising being a son. 'For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.'

Esau had plenty of reasons to be a victim, both in the stew incident, and then after it. He was genuinely tricked by his deceptive, sneaky brother. Esau (and most commentators agree) was born with a congenital condition called 'hypertrichosis', or werewolf syndrome. I know that is pretty full on. That is why he was so hairy. He looked absolutely beastly. That was the fruit of the genetic proximity of Isaac and Rebecca. This genetic problem that he had was the fruit of his parents' marriage. He probably felt pretty conspicuous (I think *you* would feel pretty conspicuous if you looked like a werewolf) and compensated for his identity vulnerability through his physical feats which were advanced by his father. I half-suspect that his dad is feeling pretty awful about this himself. The very thing that Esau shows a bit of aptitude to, Isaac is pouring out on. He is doubly a victim because his mum does not like him as much as she likes the other guy. With some of us, we have a bit of a whinge about nothing really. This guy genuinely had some problems. His mother obviously preferred Jacob and then he was tricked by his sneaky younger brother.

The point is that his weariness and distress were the opportunity to cry out to the Lord for help. Right there in that crucible ('I am weary') is the place to say I need some help. Instead of saying, 'I am weary, and it is everybody else's fault', it was the opportunity to cry out to the Lord for help rather than to seek some compensation. There was a context for conversation with Isaac and a season for repentance. However, the Scriptures say Esau continued to choose his own way.

A second and associated indicator of a person despising their birthright is how they value their citizenship in the New Jerusalem. This is particularly demonstrated by how we participate in the *agape* meal. This is Luke chapter 14 verses 16 to 21. 'Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited [Would you agree that a person who is invited is someone who has a right to be at the table? This is someone with a birthright.] ... "Come, for all things are now ready." But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said, "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused." And

another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused." Still another said, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry [this is him hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans and of Esau], said to his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and maimed and the lame and the blind." '

The birthright is citizenship in the heavenly city, in the midst of which is the tree of life, which is the food for our *agape* meal. We despise this citizenship and this food when we establish the ground and conditions of meeting others and also in our house. That is 'I have bought a ground'. Instead of coming and joining the fellowship of the word (or the ground) of truth established through the word of the presbytery, it is someone who presumes to cultivate and entertain a different conversation - another ground. Or when our priority is our business or worldly success, whether it is at school or in whatever setting; or when we reject the need for the reformation of our marriages and families, that is, 'I have married a wife'. This is despising our birthright.

Our rejection of the birthright is evident because of our lack of repentance and faith, and an increasing reaction against the word that calls for our obedience. We begin to get a name within the context of the *agape* meal that reflects the thing that we have chosen over our birthright. Esau received a new name when he rejected his birthright, and he was named after the thing that he chose over his birthright, which was Red Stew - Edom. My question is: how are you known in the fellowship of the *agape* meal? Are you known as an opinionated person or an alternative reference to the fellowship of the presbytery? That would be someone who is choosing another ground. That starts to become your name. Are you known as a great businessman or a great musician or a great sports person or a great student? Or are you known as a pleasure seeker? Or are you one known as one who preferences your family over the body of Christ? Or are you known as one who is born in Zion? Are you known as one who has taken Christ's yoke upon

you - committed to serving by love in the fellowship of this body?

I want to finish with this point - your good name is chosen. You have a good name, and it is a good name for you because it comes from God. Proverbs 22 verse 1 says, 'A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favour rather than silver and gold.'

In this season, the Lord is calling us to forsake the alternative yokes that make us weary and belong to those who do not treasure their birthright. Christ is saying, 'Come to Me.' He wants us to personally meet Him. Then He is saying, 'Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me,' To do this, we need to say, 'I believe, help my unbelief.' This is the disposition of one who is poor in spirit, who is able to be helped by the Spirit. To live and walk this way is the means by which we obtain the blessing - the promise to Abraham.