

Scripture Reading: Genesis 48:19 – 49:28

“17 Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father’s hand to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. 18 And Joseph said to his father, “Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.” 19 But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.” 20 So he blessed them that day, saying, “By you Israel will bless, saying, ‘May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!’” And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh. 21 Then Israel said to Joseph, “Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. 22 Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow.” 49 And Jacob called his sons and said, “Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days: 2 “Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob, And listen to Israel your father. 28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father spoke to them. And he blessed them; he blessed each one according to his own lessing.”

“Jacob Blesses His Sons”

The closing chapters of Genesis bring us to the end of the story of Jacob and to the end of the Book of Beginnings! Since the early chapters we have seen how so many of the promises and principles of God’s grand plans are established here at the beginning!

- **We have tried to be faithful to the command of Jesus to find Him and His work here in the pages of the Old Testament.**

As Jacob nears death we have found important lessons for us today:

- **First, we saw a return to the foundations of hope that were laid in the lives of the patriarchs Abraham, Issac and Jacob.**
- **Last week & today, we find Jacob living in hope as he adds to his twelve sons and blesses them all!**
- **AND finally, we will see hope for the future as the bones of both Jacob and Joseph are laid to rest as they await the final resurrection!**

In this way, it should be easy to see our Savior Jesus here in the pages of the Old Testament! The examples that we see here in the final days of Jacob remind us that:

- **Jesus is our Rock, or foundation!**
- **Jesus is our Life, or living hope!**
- **And yes, Jesus is our only hope for the future!**

Last week we saw Jacob bless the two sons of Joseph who he had adopted as his own sons, making their heirs part of Twelve Tribes of Israel. Now Jacob gathers his twelve natural born sons and blesses them in the birth order in which they were born:

- **He begins with the sons of Leah whom he will soon be buried with in the Land of Promise!**

As Jacob moves through these blessings there will be reminders from the past as well as indications of where they will serve in God’s grand plan of salvation, in the Land of Promise, in the coming of Jesus and even to the end of times!

Establishing the Nation of Israel from the twelve tribes was a critical part of God’s grand plan as the Apostle Paul reminded us as he grieved over his fellow countrymen in Romans 9:

“3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.”

As we consider these blessings we should also remember a powerful symbol we find in Exodus. When they are delivered as a mighty nation just a few hundred years later, they will journey past Elim where 12 springs watered seventy palm trees.

- Yes, the twelve tribes were to minister to the seventy nations & that plan continues today as the Church takes the Gospel to all the nations.

We should remember that the Church, the Bride of Jesus, is pictured in Revelation as a great city where the twelve Apostles are its foundation and the twelve tribes its gates. Gates that are always open where the nations seek comfort and the river of life flows forth to bring them healing, taking us of course back to those springs at Elim & of course the Garden! When we keep all of these BIG pictures in mind it brings richness to the blessings that Jacob now offers:

3 “Reuben, you are my firstborn, My might and the beginning of my strength, The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. 4 Unstable as water, you shall not excel, Because you went up to your father’s bed; Then you defiled it— He went up to my couch.”

- As we discussed last week, as the first born, Reuben should have received the double-blessing, but he forfeited the birthright with his great sin against his own father.

Instead of being the one to continue the line of promise that would bring forth the Messiah Jesus and serving in a major role in the history of the Nation of Israel, Reuben’s unstable nature and sin would leave him as just one of the average tribes of Israel.

- There is an important lesson here for all of us when we think about our own nature and actions!

As Nate Wilson likes to point out we are all players in God’s story and it is good at times to step back and ask whether we like our character! Would you want a review of your life to conclude that instead of being grounded on a godly foundation, you were found to be as unstable as water?

You young people will often hear about the importance of self-control from your parents and those who are older, and the lack of self-control exhibited by Reuben is a good example to encourage you to heed such wisdom:

- Rash actions have consequences that effect the rest of your life and perhaps even far down in history!
- So the double blessing is denied to the oldest and would then move on to the other brothers, but sadly the next two have also taken themselves out of the running:

5 “Simeon and Levi are brothers; Instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place. 6 Let not my soul enter their council; Let not my honor be united to their assembly; For in their anger they slew a man, And in their self-will they hamstrung an ox. 7 Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob And scatter them in Israel.”

Remember that these brothers in wanting to avenge the humiliation of their sister deceived the men of Shechem by deceitfully offering them a place in God’s covenant when in fact they wanted to kill them all in their weakness after being circumcised. Reuben violated his father’s marriage covenant and now these brothers violated God’s covenant with His people.

- As we would suspect from our lessons about God’s Kingdom taking priority over family obligations or covenants, these two now face a more severe punishment.

Not only will neither of them have the place of honor in the line of Promise, but they will be the two tribes who will inherit no land of their own after they enter the land of Promise!

- **Because of their cruelty, they will be divided and scattered in Israel!**

And this is just what we find in the history of the nation of Israel: The Levites have no land of their own and the tribe of Simeon only has land within the territory given to Judah!

- **And this brings us to Judah who we know does have the blessing of being in the line of promise!**

8 “Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father’s children shall bow down before you.”

Just as the dreams of Joseph came to pass with all of his brothers bowing before him when he became the ruler of Egypt...

- **So Jacob now sees that Judah will bring forth the line of rulers in Israel, which includes Kings David and Solomon!**

And of course, these kings were just a foreshadow of the greater David to come, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah who is seen in Revelation 5 entering heaven as the Lamb that was slain!

9 “Judah is a lion’s whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? 10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people. 11 Binding his donkey to the vine, And his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, And his clothes in the blood of grapes. 12 His eyes are darker than wine, And his teeth whiter than milk.”

Now of course I could turn this single blessing into an entire series of sermons on the work of Jesus who even though He had the strength of a lion, laid down His life for His people: Who though He the Lord of Lords and King of Kings as the creator and sustainer of all Creation, entered Jerusalem as the humble servant king riding on a donkey.

- **Who shed His own blood to redeem His people as we will remember at the Table this morning.**
- **Thus, we see the powerful blessing given to the son of Leah and now Jacob turns to his other sons.**

Here again, many sermons could be given with regard to these blessings, but in this brief survey let us just remember that God will use these twelve sons in His grand plan even down to the Book of Revelation where in chapter 7, we find them numbered among the people of God, as they were in the Book of Ezekiel, & later as the gates of the City, the New Jerusalem.

13 “Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea; He shall become a haven for ships, And his border shall adjoin Sidon.”

Here we are reminded that God is in control of all things, including what we would call the luck of the draw... The portions of the Land of Promise were disturbed by lot or randomly from a human perspective and yet which tribe to you think inherited the haven by the sea?

- **That is right, the lot fell to Zebulun.**

14 “Issachar is a strong donkey, Lying down between two burdens; 15 He saw that rest was good, And that the land was pleasant; He bowed his shoulder to bear a burden, And became a band of slaves.”

We know little of the role that this tribe played, but the ancient Church fathers had many speculations about those two burdens, but I think what we do clearly have here is a picture of the rest for the people of God spoken of in the Book of Hebrews.

Next, we come to Dan who is the one tribe that does NOT appear in the New Testament!

In Revelation 7 we see the gathering of the 144,000 who represent the Jews of the 1st Century that responded in faith at Pentecost and the rest of the Apostle's work in the Book of Acts.

- **That list of 12,000 from each tribe includes the natural children of Jacob with Manasseh, whom Jacob had adopted as one of his own children taking the place of Dan.**

16 "Dan shall judge his people As one of the tribes of Israel. 17 Dan shall be a serpent by the way, A viper by the path, That bites the horse's heels So that its rider shall fall backward."

Why Dan was excluded in Revelation is open to speculation, but it is hard to miss the references that should remind us of Judas:

- **The one disciple that fell from Grace as well.**

We rejoice in the promise given in the Garden to our first parents, that the Seed of the Woman would come to crush the seed of the serpent. But we are also told there that the seed of the serpent would bruise His heel and here with Dan it is called biting his heel and causing him to fall backward. Now of course this is all in God's grand plan because what the religious leaders saw as falling backwards into defeat was in fact Christ being the victor! Standing at the feet of the cross they mocked their Savior saying,

"He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him."

The cross they saw as His final defeat, was actually the moment of triumph where the serpent's head was crushed. Thus when Jesus ascends into heaven the Angel proclaims: "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah" who appeared as "a Lamb as though it had been slain."

Now I am sure that it grieved Jacob as a father to proclaim such a blessing on this son, just as our hearts ache when we consider the tragedy of Judas. And yet, we know that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes and so I think this is why the truth about Dan is followed by the glorious truth that Jacob proclaims in verse 18:

18 "I have waited for your salvation, O Lord!" This might appear out a bit out of context, but we will reflect on this comfort a bit more at the Table this morning, but for now Jacob continue his blessings:

19 "Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him, But he shall triumph at last."

The Ancient Church Fathers saw this 'troop' or raiders as some translate it, as the religious leaders who opposed Jesus. While that can certainly apply I suspect that Gad's blessing reminds us about the entire history of God's people when we think of all the attacks they endured and failures they suffered:

- **But in the end, they were victorious through the work of Jesus!**

20 "Bread from Asher shall be rich, And he shall yield royal dainties."

Again, we know little about the tribe of Asher, but in this case, we have a reminder in the Gospel of Luke about how God would have been working in all of these tribes down through the centuries to produce people of faith: When Jesus is brought to the Temple to be dedicated we find Anna of the tribe of Asher there in prayer and she is used of God to help proclaim the coming of Israel's Messiah, speaking to all those who looked for redemption!

21 "Naphtali is a deer let loose; He uses beautiful words."

Naphtali means a spreading vine or branch which is used as a symbol for Jesus in the New Testament and it is interesting to note that Jesus often ministered in and around Capernaum, which we are told was in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. And finally, we come to the children of Jacob's beloved wife Rachael...

Remembering of course that he had already blessed Joseph by adopting and blessing his two sons, Jacob nonetheless still has further blessings for his favored son... And again as we listen to the words of Jacob,

we should be reminded of how the work that Joseph has done in saving his family & all of Egypt is a type of Christ and of course how it looks forward to the work of Jesus the greater Joseph.

22 “Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a well; His branches run over the wall. 23 The archers have bitterly grieved him, Shot at him and hated him. 24 But his bow remained in strength, And the arms of his hands were made strong By the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), 25 By the God of your father who will help you, And by the Almighty who will bless you With blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath, Blessings of the breasts and of the womb. 26 The blessings of your father Have excelled the blessings of my ancestors, Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.”

And finally we come to the youngest of Jacob’s children...

27 “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; In the morning he shall devour the prey, And at night he shall divide the spoil.”

Now the tribe of Benjamin has a very interesting history where we find them almost destroyed in the Book of Judges because of their wickedness and then come to be the only tribe that remains with Judah in the southern Kingdom when the nation is divided.

Of course, they are most famous as the tribe that brought forth one of the most prominent Saints of the New Testament, the Apostle Paul!

Again, the Ancient Church Fathers clearly saw Paul in this prophesy as the ravenous wolf who hunted Christians and then became the Apostle to the Gentiles bringing many spoils into God’s Kingdom!

Now as I mentioned we could have spent a great deal more time on these texts...

- **But for this morning I want us to focus on two important lessons as we consider how these inform our Christian walk.**

First, we see again that God moves through history as He chooses and at His own pace!

We know that the coming of Jesus changed everything and should be seen as the focal point of all of history: However, we also see the history that led up to the coming of Jesus and we live in the history that continues today!

- **God uses means to accomplish His purposes and those means include fallen people!**

Even those found in the company of God’s people are still fallen creatures and it is important for us to remember as we review the history of Jacob’s sons and the history of the nation of Israel that God desires faithfulness and not perfection.

There is only one perfect man, the man Christ Jesus and that is why His perfect life was the sacrifice for sin.

We now stand in His perfection or righteousness in the eyes of God...

- **But just as those Saints of old we are still players in God’s story in the midst of history, and sadly that history still includes our sins and the sins of others.**

The Apostle Paul reminds us in I Corinthians 10 that the history of the Old Testament is given as our example, to remind us that God uses faithful people, not perfect people!

The Apostle John also states this truth very clearly in the opening chapter of his first Epistle:

I John 1: “4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. [Jesus the only perfect man!] 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

The Apostle John shows us what it means to live in the power of the Holy Spirit and seeing how God used the Saints of old helps to encourage us in our walk, remembering the lessons we are learning here at the end of Genesis...

- **We want our lives built on the only proper foundation:
The Finished Work of Jesus!**
- **We want to live our lives in the power of the Holy Spirit because it is Christ Who lives in us!**
- **And we want to look forward to the hope of the resurrection when the last enemy, death will be defeated!**

Communion Meditation: Psalm 24

In Psalm 24 we see reflections similar to Jacob’s statement that he waited upon the Lord:

**“The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness,
The world and those who dwell therein.**

2 For He has founded it upon the seas,

And established it upon the waters. 3 Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord?

Or who may stand in His holy place?

4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,

Nor sworn deceitfully.

5 He shall receive blessing from the Lord,

And righteousness from the God of his salvation.

6 This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, Who seek Your face.”