

Generous Blessing

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[0 : 00] Last words matter. When someone knows they don't have long to live, they want to share everything important with those they love.

When I knew my grandfather was sick last year and that I may not see him again, I told him two things. I told him, one, that Jesus loved him.

I told him that I loved him. To me, these were the two most important things I wanted him to know. And if someone knows the end is near, what they say shows how they have interpreted their life.

Have there been any regrets? Have there been deep joys? What are their hopes? What someone says shows what really matters.

And for the friends and for the family members on the receiving end of those words, these are the ones that count. These are the ones you will never forget.

[1 : 12] Jacob's life to this point has been filled with sorrow. He was outcast at an early age and much of his life is spent estranged from his family. He worked seven years for a wife he didn't even want.

Worked another seven for the one he actually wanted. Then his favorite wife is barren, can't have kids. And when Rachel does bear children, his favorite son is sold into slavery.

And Jacob presumes him dead. Rachel then, his wife also dies in Canaan. There's a constant theme to Jacob's life.

He's constantly mourning the loss of his family. But there's one thing that has kept him going. The future. His future hope in God's promises of restoration for him.

At one of the lowest moments in Jacob's life in chapter 35, God appears to him. He assures him of his presence and promises that no matter what has happened so far, that Jacob will have countless descendants through whom God will bless the earth.

[2 : 22] And that though Jacob lived most of his life without a family, that God would bring him and his family back to the promised land as an everlasting possession.

Well, later in life, Jacob's fortunes would change dramatically. He's reunited with Joseph. And where Jacob had lost his family, now he's reunited with all of his sons in Egypt.

The promises that God had been making to him all those years ago are coming true before his very eyes. They were coming together.

And now God and now Jacob, he's lying on his bed. He's about to die. So he rallies all his strength. And he wants to leave his son, his son Joseph, with what is most important.

This hope that has carried him through all of these years, he wants to share with him the future. And my conviction for us today is that we need the future just as much.

[3 : 27] Like Jacob, like Joseph, we too need to dream. We need a certain future in the midst of a very uncertain world. And my hope for you is that this hope that has filled Jacob's heart would be yours today, especially through the lowest moments of your life and the greatest moments of your life.

See, the future is what drives Jacob to bless Joseph and his sons here. Have a look at verse 3. Jacob said to Joseph, Notice that all these things here, all these blessings are future things.

That God's assurance of the future has sustained him through these darkest moments of his life. I wonder if you're a little bit sick about hearing about blessing again.

Maybe this feels like the 48th time that you've heard about blessing in our never-ending Genesis series. But you know what? It's actually sad because blessing is so devalued in our world today.

Indeed, our greatest blessings are reserved for when someone sneezes. Just give me a sec. God bless you for you exhaled dust out of your blessed nostrils.

[5 : 06] Or if you're a real Christian, your greatest blessings are reserved at the end of an email. Just so you can show your recipients just how godly you are. Blessings, Devon.

God bless you as the recipient of this beautiful email. But you see, blessing in the Bible is a matter of life and death.

Remember in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve, they sin against God, they eat the fruit, they are cursed. And so if God is the giver, if God is the sustainer of all life, rejecting him must lead to death.

And so death floods into the world. The natural world is cursed. It brings death now. Humanity's relationship with each other is cursed. Cain murders his brother Abel.

And humanity's relationship with this creator is cursed. God removes them from the Garden of Eden, which is his place of life. But through Genesis, what we've seen now is that God is undoing the curse.

[6 : 12] He's restoring now what has been lost. And as Jacob experiences loss, he longs for restoration. He's so desperate for this blessing that he wrestles with God.

God dislocates his hip. And even as he does that, he will not let go until he receives this blessing. Why? Because the blessing reverses the curse and restores life to a dying world.

It's this blessing now that Jacob wants to extend to Joseph's sons in verse 5. This is what he says. Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine.

Any children born to you after them will be yours in the territory they inherit. They will be reckoned under the names of their brothers. This is significant.

Because if you remember, Ephraim and Manasseh are born in Egypt. And more than that, their mother, Jacob's wife, her name is Azanath, she's an Egyptian. Her father is a pagan Egyptian priest.

[7 : 27] So these boys, they are not pure blood descendants, but they are partially born outside of the covenant. And so Jacob here, what he's doing is he's treating these two boys as his own children, as if they were pure flesh and blood.

Even today, as people write their wills, all the property goes to the kids. They divide everything amongst their children. But here, what Jacob is doing is he's carving these two Egyptian boys into his will.

They will inherit these pieces of the promised land, and they're given full status within God's covenant. This is adoption. He says they are mine in verse 5.

And this foreshadows the miracle of adoption in the gospel. I'm an only child, and I love being an only child. I love it.

Growing up, I got all of my parents' affection, attention. They gave me the best of everything, everything I needed, everything I wanted. And the best thing was, I never had to share with anyone.

- [8 : 39] I can't imagine what it would have been like to share that with another. I never grew up wanting brothers or sisters. I never wanted that. Man, I'm so selfish, eh? But that is why adoption is a miracle.
- It is grafting someone from the outside in, into the family, with the same status, with the same rights and privileges, as if one of their own.
- Jesus, too, was an only child. But his relationship with his father is infinitely more intimate and wonderful than even mine with my parents.
- But through adoption, what God is doing is he's treating us, you and I, as if we are his children, just like Christ himself. And like Joseph's sons, we, too, get an inheritance.
- 1 Peter 1 says that we've been born again into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade, kept in heaven for you. That's the gospel.
- [9 : 41] That in Christ we experience adoption. Where humanity was previously cast out of the garden, now Jesus is punished. He's cast out for us so that we can be brought near.
- John chapter 1 says that all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. And through Ephraim and Manasseh's adoption, we begin to see the fulfillment of this Abrahamic blessing all the way back in chapter 12.
- That through these Egyptian sons, God is beginning to bless the nations by bringing them inside his covenant. So Jacob, he's acting in faith. He's so confident about the future that God will bless the nations through his family that he adopts the nations in.
- Right now, in China, millions and millions and millions are turning to Christ. What right do these people, my people, what right do they have on the other side of the world?
- So many worshipping the God of their ancestors, buying into superstition, sharing nothing in common with this God of Israel. What right do they have to be treated as a child of God of Israel?
- [10 : 56] And yet, we all share in the inheritance of Christ. Adoption is God's means of extending his blessing into the world. And it still is.
- God's kingdom is progressing. It's extending right now. One adoption, one salvation at a time. But not only is God's blessing extended to the nations, but it's always done in God's way.
- It's reversed. Jacob's site's not very good in verse 8. So he asks, who are these guys? It's kind of strange because Jacob just made this grand statement to adopt these kids.
- Doesn't even recognize them. Who are they? Huh? His eyesight might have been poor with his old age. Maybe in an age without contact lenses or laser eye surgery.
- And so Jacob now, he proceeds to bless these boys. To formally adopt them into his family and to give them life under the covenant of God. It wasn't so long ago, maybe in your grandparents' generation, where the eldest child always gets the biggest chunk of the will.
- [12 : 08] This was the privilege of being the eldest. You know, you probably know this for you who have had kids. Your first child's always crazy. It's always euphoric. Every child after that's a bit meh.
- I can say that because I'm the only child. In this ancient culture, the eldest child always got the best. They got the formal blessing. And the priority of the firstborn was actually a very normal part of their culture.
- But God, as he does, undermines the cultural expectation. As Jacob begins to bless Ephraim and bless Manasseh in verse 12, Joseph, he wants to continue the priority of the firstborn.

So he puts Ephraim at the right hand of privilege and puts Manasseh at the left hand of shame, maybe. I don't know. I just don't like that because I'm a left-hander.

And it's sad that left-handers always get the... That's always the bad one, you know. Anyway, I'm joking. Anyway, read with me at verse 12. Then Joseph removed them from Israel's knees and bowed down with his face to the ground.

[13 : 17] And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right towards Israel's left hand, and Manasseh on his left towards Israel's right hand, and brought them close to him.

But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger. And crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn.

You thought magicians were sneaky with their little cups? Jacob is the OG, as they say, the original gangster. He switches hands last minute to give blessing to the younger over the older.

But Joseph, well, he thinks Jacob has gone crazy in his old age. In verse 17, when Joseph saw his father place his right hand on Ephraim's head, he was displeased.

Or literally, it was evil in his eyes. So he took hold of his father's hand to move it back from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's. Maybe he thinks that he made a mistake because the old man can't see.

[14 : 21] But we know that Jacob, he's not crazy, is he? He's perfectly of right mind. He's led by God to continue and establish pattern all the way through this book.

This is just another one of God's many reversals of blessing in Genesis. It's Abel the younger over Cain. It's Isaac the younger over Ishmael. Jacob the younger over Esau.

And after all, Joseph, of all people, should know this. He was the youngest. He was one of the youngest. But he was the one that's favored over all his other brothers by his father.

This is election. Election means that God chooses, not us. God doesn't bend to the expectations of our culture. Instead of Joseph getting the way he planned, God chooses.

God chooses who he wants to bless. And he does it in his way. In our culture, many see election as tyranny. As God forcing himself.

[15 : 30] But this passage shows that election is love. Decisions even wiser, even greater than Joseph will know. And quite frankly, when humans make the plans, it doesn't go so well.

Beetles, cane beetles absolutely ravaged sugar cane fields in Queensland. So we came up with a brilliant idea. Cane toads.

Cane toads love nothing more, of course, than to dine on these beetles. So the obvious solution is, in 1935, 2,400 cane toads released in Queensland.

And now, there are 200 million of them. And they didn't even do a good job with the beetles. We, in our wisdom, can't take care of the beetle.

But let's bring this a little bit closer to home. Because when we take things into our own hands, how has that gone for us? I would say that no one has messed up your life more.

[16 : 39] No one has hurt you more than you. Because we have no idea what is best. But God, in his sovereignty and wisdom, is consistently doing things in what we would consider a strange way.

Defying our logic, but always bringing about a greater outcome. Romans 9 to 11. God hardens the Jews. He hardens those with the natural rights to election.

So he can elect, he can graft in the Gentiles. Or within the grand plan of eventually bringing back the Jews. So that all can be saved. Without God's election, we're not here today.

Yes, election may lay me completely at the mercy of God. But since when has that been a bad thing? And lastly, not only is this blessing extended, not only is it reversed, but it is anticipated in the future.

Because Jacob, he's about to leave this world. And as he leaves this world, Joseph and his family are in a very, very good moment. Egypt has recovered from famine.

[17 : 51] Joseph and his family are under Pharaoh's protection. Joseph is one of the most powerful people in the most powerful nation in the world. There's wealth. There's prosperity. There is stability for this family.

But there's a threat that is lurking in the background. There is a real danger that Joseph would just want to stay and become an Egyptian.

After all, he's the two I see to Pharaoh. He has a wife who's the daughter of a son worshipping priest. Life is set for him to dominate in Egypt. What's set before him is a really good life.

But now as Jacob is about to die, these are some of the final words he gives to his son in verse 21. Then Israel said to Joseph, I'm about to die, but God will be with you and take you back to the land of your fathers.

And to you, I give you one ridge of land, one more ridge of land than your brothers, the ridge I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow. Jacob promises Joseph that his future is tied up with the God of Israel, not with Egypt.

[19 : 08] This is not home, he says. Egypt is a temporary home that pales in comparison to their final destination. It's this future hope here.

It's this home that is constantly driving Jacob in this passage. Firstly, he repeats God's future promises of land, people and blessing. He adopts Joseph's sons.

He gives Joseph a piece of land himself. And through these actions, Jacob is saying to Joseph, I don't care about Egypt. Give me a place in the kingdom of God.

Jacob's actions are screaming out at Joseph not to settle for the pleasures of Egypt, only to forego comfort for another home. And so by the end of this passage, we're left with this question.

Will Joseph assimilate? Will he be so consumed by his status with his life in Egypt that he will forego the future blessing of life?

[20 : 11] If Joseph is to take hold of this future blessing, he cannot stay where he is. He must realize that this blessing is better than anything Egypt has to offer.

Going back or even thinking about the promised land seems like the illogical decision. It's far away. It might not be safe. Who knows who's actually there? Who knows what it's like?

But God promises Jacob, he promises Joseph that this is the blessing that gives life. This is life in the promised land of Canaan, living with their God who has sustained them all these years.

But by the end of this passage, not only is Joseph left with a decision, but so are we. Many of us, we live in the east or in the southeastern suburbs of Melbourne.

The median house price in Doncaster is \$1.4 million. Many of us have had a privilege of a good education, a good job, a great church.

[21 : 20] All in all, life is pretty good, right? And so our temptation is the same as Joseph's because we are so prone to get so consumed by our lives here that we forget the future blessing to come.

We adopt the world's values. We sell out for what we can enjoy now. And in so doing, we are throwing away the blessing of life. Even as we come here, as we come to church week after week, we need to ask, we need to ask ourselves, have we fallen in love with this life?

Are our lives so marked by worldliness, by consumerism, by greed, by lust? Are we looking so much like the world that we have forgotten our future?

These blessings of adoption, of election, of life, they have been secured to us by Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who adopts us into our family.

He takes the curse on himself so that we could receive eternal life. Our inheritance is not a block of land in a nice suburb, but it is the new heavens and the new earth which has been prepared for us.

[22 : 36] But to take hold of these blessings, it requires something. It requires us to forego this life. Our hopes, our dreams, as we were talking about before, our comfort.

Not that we all quit our jobs and pray like monks. It's so much deeper than that. Taking hold of this blessing requires a reorientation of our life.

Not just recognizing Jesus Christ as Savior, but recognizing Jesus Christ as Lord. That's what this land represents.

It represents a life of blessing under the reign of God. Because as good as Egypt is, it's never enough.

Even the best moments of life, they never seem to last. I don't know about you, but I just want to hold on to all these moments of joy, the greatest moments of my life.

[23 : 36] But they always fade. Circumstances change. The people I love move away. People pass away. And so often, we're just left with memories.

Memories we long to recapture, but we can't. I don't know about you, but I don't want to have to say goodbye anymore.

I'm sick of saying goodbye to the people I love. If this life is it, I'm not buying. I'm not buying.

But in Christ, this is not it. The best is yet to come. That's what Hebrews 11 is about. It's about the future invading and reinterpreting our present.

And if this life is not it, it frees me, doesn't it, to take risks in this life. Forgoing what is comfortable, what is familiar, to do something great for the glory of God.

[24 : 38] Maybe it might be stepping up or serving or leading in a way that you don't feel qualified for. Even if it means it's more stress and less time.

Maybe it's considering full-time gospel ministry and preparing for that. Even if it means less money. It means you might have to forfeit these dreams you might have had for your career.

Maybe it's just mustering up the courage to share the gospel at work. Because even if you're made to look stupid, even if you always lose the debates with your friends, it doesn't matter.

Because your gospel future means so much more than your present shame. Sometimes in life, you just have to take a risk. Things might go bad.

You might fail. You might look like a fool. But as you get to the end of your life, you want to at least say that in faith, you tried.

[25 : 38] That you took a stand. That you were living for another world, not this own. One way to know that we're living for the future is our ability to take risks in the present.

So don't worry if you don't get everything in this life. Everything will be yours. That's what the gospel does. It changes things. The gospel will always meet you where you are, but it will never leave you where you are.

So just like Jacob, like Joseph, with their dreams, we dream too. Just like their dreams gave them certainty for the future, we too are dreaming of a certain future.

We dream of a future where joy will not be fleeting, but it will be permanent. It's a land where no one can strip you of what matters to you most.

No loneliness, no sorrow, no suffering. That's the dream that we have. And it will come to pass. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the certainty of our hope.

[26 : 48] We thank you that we don't worry about our salvation, that assurance is found in the cross of Christ. Lord, help us to adopt this future orientation, that we would be living for the world to come and not our life here.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.