

# Blessings for God's Family

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I confess, I do love living in Melbourne, except at the moment. This past week, it feels like we just live in the wrong state, doesn't it? It's been dark and wet, with most days topping 13 degrees, while most days in Brisbane, where my brother lives, has been sunny and 21 degrees.

In fact, according to my weather app, it's 6 degrees in Doncaster and 18 in Brisbane. Down here, there's fog outside. It's freezing, isn't it? And while in Brisbane last Thursday, recorded eight consecutive COVID-free case days, last Thursday, Victoria recorded eight consecutive double-digit cases days, didn't we?

And now we're up to 11 days with double digits. I think we got 41 cases only yesterday. So it feels like we're actually living in the unclean state of Australia, like we have leprosy or something.

Because you may have heard the New South Wales Premier last week or the week before, say on the next slide on your screens there, with the red underlined, she called on tourism vendors to bar any travellers from Melbourne.

Melbourne. And at the bottom there, called on all organisations not to interact with citizens from Melbourne. Can you feel the laugh? Despite the fact that only a few weeks ago, she was the one complaining that the other states had closed their borders to New South Wales.

[ 1 : 3 1 ] And now to be sensible for a moment, we do need to stop the spread, don't we? But the point is, when it comes to the states of Australia at the moment, there seems to be mixed blessings, whether COVID or weather.

And we here in Victoria seem to have the bad blessings. Well, as we come to Genesis 49 today, we also come to some mixed blessings.

Not the states of Australia, but the sons of Jacob. And remember, Jacob is dying. And last week, we saw adoption into God's family, where he adopted his grandsons to share in the blessings.

And this week, we see the blessings for God's family, because now he calls his sons to receive them. You can see the context in verse 1 and 2 of your Bibles.

Have a look there. So verse 1, And notice here, Jacob is going to tell them about their future, what will happen in days to come.

[ 2 : 5 1 ] You see, the custom here was that all male heirs would come to their father's deathbed to receive his final blessings, which would shape their future.

It was like the reading of his last will and testament. But for these patriarchs, that's Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they were like Old Testament prophets.

The blessings they gave were the ones God fulfilled. Sometimes in unexpected ways. And so these blessings Jacob is about to give would shape his son's futures.

What sort of tribe they'd become. That is how the passage ends in verse 28. Just skip down to verse 28 for a moment. We didn't read this, so verse 28.

All these are the 12 tribes of Israel. And this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him.

[ 3 : 56 ] When it says appropriate to him, it doesn't mean appropriate for what the sons did, even though that's true for some of them, as we'll see. It means appropriate for what they will become, which is true for all of them.

You see, these blessings shaped their future, what would happen in the days to come. But they are mixed blessings, like the states of Australia.

And for starters, some of them are actually bad blessings, like the state of Victoria. Which brings us to point one. This is going to be by far our longest point, most of the sermon, actually.

So have a look there at verse 3 and 4. He says, To Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honour, excelling in power, turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel.

For you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch, and defiled it. Here, Jacob acknowledges Reuben as his firstborn, which came with a position of power and honour.

[ 5 : 06 ] But back in chapter 35, Reuben slept with one of his father's wives, Bilhar, who's actually the mother of two own brothers.

So it's sinful and gross, isn't it? And so now he will no longer excel. In fact, he loses his firstborn position.

Remember last week, Joseph's sons went on the next slide on your screen. And Manasseh and Ephraim from 10 and 11, because Joseph was born 11th there. They went from there to the next slide, to the firstborn.

They were adopted as firstborn with Reuben and Simeon. But now this week, Reuben has lost that position. And so on the next slide, Ephraim and Manasseh now rank number one.

And this bad blessing or punishment shaped the future of Reuben's tribe. Not only did the Reubenites lose that firstborn position, they no longer excelled either.

[ 6 : 13 ] There is no prophet or judge or king that came from the tribe of Reubenites. In fact, one Bible commentator says, the Reubenites seem to fade out of national history with a whimper.

So Reuben is not really the tribe you want to belong to, is it? Or what about Simeon and Levi? Well, verse 5, Simeon and Levi are brothers.

Their swords are weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council. Let me not join their assembly, because they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased.

Cursed be their anger, so fierce and their fury so cruel. I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in the nation of Israel.

This refers to an incident back in chapter 34, when their sister Dinah was taken by a man called Shechem.

[ 7 : 18 ] Simeon and Levi, they didn't just seek justice, which would have been understandable. They took revenge. They killed every single man in that city and looted it.

And the reference to hamstringing oxen there in verse 6, it's a cruel thing when someone cuts the tendons of their legs so they can't walk properly.

And now chapter 34 doesn't tell us they did this, that they may have, or it may just be a poetic way of speaking about their cruelty in general. As verse 7 says, their fury so cruel.

Cruel. Either way, they went far beyond justice. And so verse 7, their tribes will end up being dispersed among the nation of Israel.

And it was fulfilled. Simeon got a spot of land on your screens down the bottom of Israel. All the coloreds are different tribes that make up the whole nation of Israel.

[ 8 : 21 ] And Simeon is in the middle of Judah, down the bottom there. And so over time, they were absorbed by Judah and ended up being dispersed in Judah. And in fact, some dispersed up into the north as well.

All this is a reminder that sin has consequences, isn't it? And not just for us, but for others too. If we believe in Jesus, we can be forgiven by God, which is amazing.

It never gets old. But our sin can still have ripple effects to others. Just like these brothers' sin had ripple effects to their tribes. I mean, just think of a marriage affair.

How many people does that sin impact? Friends, you have to force the two sides. Family, not to mention kids. And sometimes kids are so scarred that it affects their future marriages too.

And on it goes. Now, I realize all this talk of sin, it makes people think Christians are just party poopers. You know, we're always trying to stop people from having a good time.

[ 9 : 26 ] But Christians are actually party promoters because we know living God's way without sin actually promotes the best kind of life or party.

You know, one with no hangovers, so to speak. What's more, we also know as Christians, there is grace which can change our future. So with Levi, his tribe was dispersed throughout the nation of Israel.

God fulfilled this blessing here. But because of God's grace, they were made priests with the privilege of teaching God's people throughout the nation of Israel.

You see, even though our sin can have ripple effects, there's always grace to forgive and even secure our eternal future. And sometimes there's grace even to change our earthly future too.

Well, we move from these bad blessings to some mixed blessings. Have a look. We don't have time to look at them all, so we'll move a bit quicker now. Verse 14, Issachar is a raw-boned donkey lying down among the sheep pens.

[ 10 : 37 ] When he sees how good his resting place and how pleasant is his land, he will bend his shoulder to the burden, sorry, shoulder to the burden and submit to forced labor.

So this is a bit of a mixed one, isn't it? Issachar finds some good land, so on your screens, he's the yellow tribe right in the middle there. He's next to the Jordan River, just southwest of the Sea of Galilee.

So he's got water for irrigation and so on. And yet it seems they give up some of their freedom and submit to forced labor, which is perhaps why he's a raw-boned or strong donkey.

Either way, it's a mixed blessing, isn't it? Same for Dan. Verse 16, Dan will provide justice for his people as one of the tribes of Israel. That's positive. And in fact, he does.

Samson comes from this tribe and defeats the Philistines, brings justice for Israel. Yet, verse 17, Dan will also be a snake by the roadside, a viper along the path that bites the horse's heels so that the rider tumbles backwards.

[ 11 : 46 ] They will act like a snake and in Genesis, that's not a good thing. The last time was when they tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, the serpent, remember. here is mixed blessings again along with Gad and Benjamin and us too actually.

I mean, life does not always go smoothly for us, does it? That might be the understatement of this year. We experience both ups and downs, don't we? If only we could have just the good blessings without the bad because the rest of the sons, that's what they seem to have.

I mean, verse 20, have a look there, verse 20, Asher's food will be rich, he will provide delicacies for the king, here are good blessings only, the good life with fine food, this is the master chef tribe of Israel.

That's not a bad tribe to belong to, is it? And Naphtali in verse 21 is a bit hard to understand but it too looks positive. Though both their good blessings are dwarfed by Joseph, just come down to verse 22.

Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring whose branches climb over a wall. With business, archers attacked him. I think it's talking about his brothers, they shot at him with hostility but his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber because of the hand of the mighty one of Jacob, because of the shepherd, the rock of Israel, because of your father's God who helps you because of the almighty who blessed you with blessings of the skies above, blessings of the deep springs below, blessings of the breast and womb.

[ 13 : 31 ] Jacob begins by retelling Joseph's story, how he's fruitful now but before he was attacked by his brothers and yet God was with him all the time which ensured he would be blessed.

God's presence with Joseph meant God's blessings for Joseph which is true for us too spiritually, isn't it? But after recounting Joseph's past, Jacob now predicts his future in verse 26.

Your father's blessings are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains than the bounty of the age-old hills. Let all these rest on the head of Joseph.

That is Ephraim and Manasseh as well on the brow of the prince among his brothers. Jacob's blessings for Joseph means he will be the prince among his brothers.

He is in the firstborn position and so he will inherit the most and that's what happens. And so on your screens Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh in the purple and the green there.

[ 14 : 40 ] Well together their inheritance of the land is bigger than all the other tribes. Now we saw last week that Ephraim in the green was supposed to be bigger than Manasseh in the purple but it doesn't look like that at the moment does it?

It was to start off with but we also need to remember that Ephraim was in the firstborn position above Manasseh and so he was also called or the name used for Israel sometimes.

That is all the tribes from above Judah on your screens there were known as Ephraim and so it was actually fulfilled but in an unexpected way.

But despite these blessings Judah still gives Joseph a run for his money. So come with me back to verse 8. Have a look at verse 8.

Judah your brothers will praise you your hand will be on the neck of your enemies your father's sons will bow down to you.

[ 15 : 45 ] Now Judah's name means praise but it's actually his brothers who will praise him and bow down to him. Why?

Because from him will come a king. Have a look at verse 9 and 10. You are a lion's cub Judah. Return from the prey my son like a lion he crouches and lies down like a lioness who dares to rouse him.

The scepter will not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.

verse 9 is a picture of the king of the jungle the lion who remains unchallenged well so too the tribe of Judah will produce the king of Israel unchallenged.

In fact in verse 10 the true king will always come from Judah for it says the scepter will not depart until it comes to the one from Judah to whom it belongs the ultimate king from Judah.

- [ 16 : 59 ] And just look at the kingdom and the king that this ultimate one will be. Verse 11 He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch, he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes, his eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk.

Here this ultimate king will end up being glorious, handsome, no need for Colgate whitening toothpaste and his kingdom will have an abundance of blessings.

Whatever you think about wine, whether you like it or not, grape vines and wine were symbols of prosperity in the Bible. Blessings, they were for the upper class and here the king can tie his donkey to the best branches and not care if the donkey eats the current vintage because there's to be so many other choice branches to choose from.

And there'll be so much wine you can wash your clothes in Penfolds Grange Hermitage if you like. It's going to be as common as water. Now of course wine stains your clothes so you never do that but you get the point.

It's poetic language for bucket loads of blessings beyond our imagining. And with a future like this surely this is the tribe you'd want to be in, isn't it?

- [ 18 : 22 ] Better than a sunny COVID-free Queensland? Well God did fulfill this blessing too for a moment. For from Judah came King David and King Solomon whose kingdom did see abundant blessing though not quite as we've seen here.

Yet we are told on the next slide that under Solomon silver became as common as stone. I mean that's a whole lot of silver isn't it? there's a fair bit of blessing here.

And the nations did come and pay homage to Solomon like the Queen of Sheba. Though not all the nations obeyed him. And what's more while God fulfilled these blessings to a certain extent they did not last.

For every tribe including Judah eventually suffered the curse of judgment because of their sin. you see for more than 200 years God warned his people and yet they persisted to ignore him.

And so they ended up being exiled out of their land. The blessings did not last. Which brings us to point two more briefly.

- [ 19 : 38 ] You see in the middle almost in the middle of our passage after six groups of blessings there is this odd verse. It's odd because it's not a blessing verse 18 is the verse and it's different to the other ones because it addresses not the sons but God.

Jacob cries out to God in verse 18 saying I look for your deliverance Lord. Perhaps as he was blessing his sons and realizing how mixed they were he thought oh crikey please God deliver my sons.

Or perhaps he knew of their sin and the curse of judgment that would inevitably follow. What's more ever since Genesis chapter three on your screens we've been looking for the offspring or descendant of Eve the woman who will crush the serpent's head and get rid of the curse of sin.

And now we're also looking for a king from Judah the ultimate king to whom this scepter belongs and whom the nations will obey.

Well God has fulfilled that in Christ. Point three. We heard this in our second reading from Revelation which was written by the Apostle John.

- [ 21 : 04 ] And do you remember what one of the elders said to John? He says on the next slide on your screen. He said see the lion of the tribe of Judah.

The king in other words has triumphed. This is Jesus being spoken about here. And yet when John looks if you keep seeing the last bit on your screen he saw not a lion but a lamb looking as if it had been slain.

this is the lion of a lamb. The king who died for us to make us a new tribe.

That's what the elders sang about on the next slide. They said that this lion of Judah this lamb it was his blood that purchased people from God that pays for our sin to deliver us from the curse in other words.

Here is the descendant of Eve who delivers us from curse and triumphs over Satan. Here is grace that changes our eternal future.

[ 22 : 12 ] But notice on your screens there he purchased a people from God. You see we don't join Judah or Levi or one of the other tribes. We join the new tribe of Christ made up from people from every other tribe and nation.

that we might become priests to serve and obey God. Here is the obedience of the nations and even ruling with Christ on earth.

Here is Jacob's blessing to Judah. Here is the descendant of Eve who delivers you see. And this new Christ tribe is the one that is truly blessed abundantly.

for our future will not be a portion of the land in Israel like it was for Judah and all the others but it will actually be the whole earth if you realize.

For as we saw last week for a moment we are co-heirs with Christ. That means whatever he inherits as an heir we inherit too as a co-heir.

[ 23 : 24 ] whether it be a perfect resurrection body like him or ruling over the whole new earth with him. And this earth will have that new car smell if you like.

for it will be a new heavens and earth as it says on your screen there. And in this new heaven and earth there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.

And in case that's not enough on the next slide there will be a city of God there. And the great street of the city was gold as pure as transparent glass.

Here is the gold and the abundant blessings we're looking at before. And it will shine with God's glory so much so we won't even need the sun. Never to be dark and miserable and three degrees in the morning again.

And no longer on your screens any curse. No more bad blessings. Nor even mixed blessings. Only good ones including seeing our loved ones.

[ 24 : 43 ] Can you imagine how good it will be? I'm not sure we can actually. I think it's beyond our imagining. But these are the promised blessings we have in Christ that will shape our future.

These are the blessings we will have in days to come in the new creation. here is your Grange Hermitage or whatever the equivalent is for you. Here is every physical blessing.

Here is sharing in everything of Christ. You see this lion of a lamb gave his all so that we might enjoy all his blessings.

And we know it will be fulfilled because it's already begun to be. as we heard last week on your screens we have already been given every spiritual blessing in this Christ tribe.

And every spiritual blessing that's a lot more than bucket loads. That's every single one there is. Isn't there? Like adoption such that God is our Father who is always with us like he was with Joseph to bless us spiritually now and ensure we make it to that new creation to enjoy every physical blessing later.

[ 26 : 06 ] In other words in the Christ tribe we have a certain and secure future guaranteed. need. So for you here this morning can I ask you which state or tribe do you belong to?

Are you in the one that's truly blessed? Are you in Christ as a Christian? Do you believe in him? If you don't or are not sure then please email us we'd love to talk to you.

But for us who are then do you realize how truly blessed our Christ tribe is? Every spiritual blessing now with the guarantee of every physical one in our future.

I don't know how your life is going for you at the moment perhaps it feels like your life is full of bad blessings like the state of Victoria the tribe of Reuben or perhaps it feels like your life is full of mixed blessings like the states of Australia or the sons of Jacob.

My family was supposed to fly out to see my wife's brother in Sweden today. We're supposed to be in the air right now and now we're not even welcome to see our family and friends in New South Wales because the New South Wales Premier said also last week on the slide please do not welcome your friends who may be intending to visit you from Victoria.

[ 27 : 30 ] It's not just the hotspots now it's the whole state we're not welcome. All this because of the sin of others who didn't keep their distance which has had that ripple effect to us.

Of course I realise that many others face much worse than that. I know some who face mixed bag of blessings when it comes to their health issues you know it's kind of one step forward two steps back.

I know others who have a mixed bag of blessings when it comes to work. They've got Job Keeper now but it doesn't quite cover the mortgage repayments and it won't last forever. For others it's a mixed bag when it comes to their Christian loved ones.

Their spouse is dying or in some cases has died. They know where they're going which is good but they still miss them and it's still sometimes her which is bad.

No matter what state we live in, no matter what mixed blessings we have, then the first application, the first big one anyway, is fix your eyes on Christ in whom we have abundant blessings that will more than make up for the mixed ones in this life.

[ 28 : 42 ] Last week I mentioned a person in my Bible study group whose prayer point was that they might fix their eyes on Jesus and not their circumstances in life. It's still a great thing to pray, isn't it? And in a sense it's the same this week.

I mean this week we've been given a glimpse of just how abundant our blessings are in Christ. We've been given more motivation to fix our eyes on Jesus. for we don't just have every spiritual blessing now, we have the future which will come with every physical blessing later.

And that will more than make up for our mixed blessings now, won't it? If the airlines put up their prices and we never make it to Sweden, well in the new creation we can go for free.

I mean that will more than make up for it. And if we cannot see our friends in New South Wales, then well it's okay, we'll see them and spend an eternity with them. In fact if they're tuning in right now they might not think that's such a blessing.

But you get the point, don't you? No matter what state we live in, no matter what mixed blessings we experience, fix your eyes on Christ in whom we have abundant blessings that will more than make up for the mixed ones.

[ 29 : 56 ] And secondly, we faithfully serve Jesus as our king, the line of Judah. Whether it's by loving others in the shopping centre, which can be hard to do, can't it?

Especially now that there is no toilet paper again, can you believe it? Or maybe it's just the one Coles I went to. But do we love others even when they push past us or in front of us as our king wants us to?

Or whether it's serving our king by serving his church. I mean, I'm so thankful that we've been able to have online services, but one of the dangers is that it breeds consumer Christians.

You know, where you just watch the screen and don't serve one another? But serving our king means joyfully serving his people. And so will you come back with bells on when we can?

Or will you resist? Or only return reluctantly? Or whether it's serving our king by the way we drive. I can't remember if I've told you this, but I remember driving down Mitchum Road and I had this song stuck in my head, this old hymn from one of our midweek services.

[ 31 : 10 ] You know, Jesus is Lord. I'm not going to sing it. You can turn down the volume anyway, I suppose. But I was singing in the car and this person cut me off. I didn't respond with bless you, you might be in a rush.

I responded with Jesus is Lord. Ah, you idiot! Jesus is Lord. Oh, what have I done? I've realized the hypocrisy. That's why God's forgiveness never gets old, by the way.

But the point is, do we keep serving our king, the lion of Judah? No matter what state we live in, what mixed blessings we experience, remember the abundant blessings we have in Christ and faithfully serve him.

for this lion of a lamb gave his all that we might have the guarantee of sharing in all his blessings in our days to come.

Let's pray. Our gracious father, we join with those in heaven who say, worthy is the lamb who was slain, to receive power and strength, honor and glory and praise.

[ 32 : 22 ] Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus, the king, the lion of Judah, who became our sacrificial lamb, dying to pay for our sins that we might share in his blessings.

Help us so to fix our eyes on him and to faithfully serve him all our days. For we ask it in his name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.