

Future Blessing from the God of Joseph

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[0 : 00] It's been another extraordinary week in the news, hasn't it? I read one columnist appealing to the nation that there was too much news. He said there is now quite simply too much news and it's got to stop.

Really, I mean it. For the sake of our national health, no more news. We're overloaded with news. We've got news coming out of our ears. We're all newsed out. A brief recap of the past week alone. In the space of just seven days, Britain voted to leave the EU. The pound plummeted. The markets panicked. The Prime Minister resigned. The Shadow Cabinet resigned. The Labour leader refused to resign.

Labour rebels launched and then halted a coup. The First Minister of Scotland begged the EU to let her country stay. Racist hate crimes shot up 400%. Boris Johnson began and ended his campaign to become Prime Minister after Michael Gove switched from being his closest ally to his worst enemy.

And all the while, the Labour Party hit fresh controversies about anti-Semitism. And I was with friends from university last night at a reunion and it seemed to be all everyone wanted to talk about.

[1 : 06] It struck me that people are really fearful because the future is so uncertain. People are saying things like, it feels like we've jumped off a precipice and we don't know what's going to happen next.

So people are fearful about the future for us in terms of Europe, in terms of the UK, about our own employment, our own finances, and there's this kind of Brexit panic.

So where do we turn to in that? Well, as we turn to God's Word this evening, we engage with this truth in this passage that we can be confident even when the future is completely unknown because we have a known God.

God says, what you know about me can mean you're confident about the future. So the big idea this evening is that God knows the future, he controls the future, and he's absolutely committed to blessing his people in the future.

So we've been in this series in Genesis for a couple of months now in the evenings. Genesis means beginnings. First book of the Bible, God telling us about the origin of the cosmos, which he made, about the origin of humanity as he created them.

[2 : 16] And then, as humanity turned from him, God pursuing a group of people as his people, the godly line in history. And we've been focused at this point in Genesis on that one family, Jacob and sons, who in our culture were kind of made more famous by the musical, Joseph.

Jacob got renamed Israel, and so God's people in the Old Testament, before Jesus came, were this group of people called Israel.

They look back on Jacob, who we've been seeing tonight blessing his sons, as their ultimate father in a way. His grandfather Abraham as well, but also Jacob, Israel, the first one of the nation.

And this is the story of their ancestors. But we as Christians, we're God's people today, so if you're a Christian tonight, this is the story of your ancestors.

This is like, who do you think you are for you? And we're thinking tonight about this idea of future blessing. Jacob is at the very end of his life, and he blesses his sons with this great poem.

[3 : 25] If you just have a look at chapter 49, verse 25, see if you can spot the repeated word. This is, when you're reading the Bible, you have different tools to understand the Bible. One of them is the repeated word tool.

Because of your father, this is chapter 49, verse 25. Because of your father's God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you, with blessings of the skies above, blessings of the deep spirits below, blessings of the breast and womb, your father's blessings are greater than the

blessings of the ancient mountains, than the bounty of the age-old hills.

Well, before I became a Christian, I thought that blessing was actually quite a weak word. You know, we say it when people sneeze. It was sort of well-wishing.

But what the Bible means by blessing is a much stronger thing. You're blessed if you're happy because God speaks well of you. Blessing just means to speak well of somebody.

So we're accustomed to that the other way around. We have, as you'll know, we sing at St. Silas songs that talk about us saying blessing. Bless the Lord, all my soul. That's us calling our souls to speak well of God.

[4 : 42] That's what a blessing is. It's a similar word to praise. But the key difference with God is that when God speaks, what he speaks immediately comes to be.

We see that in creation, don't we? He spoke and there was creative power. His speech is action. And so when God blesses you, immediately those things happen.

It's a very powerful thing when God speaks well of you. Through Jacob, God promises his future blessing on his people. And we're inheriting that blessing today.

We inherit these promises of future blessing. But as we think about that for our future, which I hope will make us feel better about the future, first of all, we're in danger of feeling a bit worse because we see this major problem highlighted in Genesis as we face the future.

And it's this, it's the lasting devastation of sin. See, Jacob gathers his sons together and he speaks these words of blessing over them. And he speaks to each son in turn.

[5 : 48] He starts with two of his grandsons, Joseph's sons. So they're kind of half tribes. And then his other sons he turns to. And remember, these are the brothers who at one time were so jealous of one another that they sold the favorite son into slavery.

Now, God has worked very powerfully in this family. That's been the miracle that we've looked at over the past weeks as God has brought this family back together and brought them to love one another.

But you can still imagine it would have been quite tense in the room as different sons are given different blessings. And things probably got much more tense as Jacob really got going because some of his blessings are really anti-blessings.

They don't sound like blessings at all. I don't know if you noticed that. And that's because sin has its consequences. So look at what happens to Reuben. You'd expect something terrific.

If you look at verse 3 of chapter 49, look at how well it starts. Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power.

[6 : 59] But then look at verse 4. Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel. For you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch, and defiled it.

We knew that happened in Genesis. In Genesis 35, Jacob had a concubine, Bilhar, and Reuben went and slept with her. And we're just told in Genesis 35, Jacob knew what had happened. Reuben might have thought for years that he got away with it. And then here he is, on blessing day, and he gets exposed by Jacob before his whole family. And the future of his descendants is dramatically affected by what he did.

The next two sons along are Simeon and Levi. Maybe if you're Simeon, or you're Levi, and you hear that, you're thinking, well, this could be quite good for us. Because now we're first, we're next in line, really, for major blessing.

So look what comes next in verse 5. Simeon and Levi are brothers. Their swords are weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council.

[8 : 12] Let me not join their assembly. For 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 Israel. Well, again, we know what happened from reading Genesis. In chapter 34, these brothers, their sister, was raped by a man, Shechem. And Simeon and Levi were so furious, they went to the settlement that Shechem's father ruled, and they massacred the men in this town. And the message here is that God was watching their vendetta.

And again, they'll have to face the consequences for their sin. Their descendants will have to face the consequences. And we see that as Israel moves into the promised land in a few hundred years' time.

They're led into the promised land by Joshua. The land gets allocated up, but the tribe of Simeon gets scattered. And the tribe of Levi becomes the priestly tribe, so it's not given any land.

[9 : 22] They live with the consequences of the sin of their forefathers. There is this lesson woven throughout the history of Israel for us today that you do reap what you sow when it comes to sin.

We've seen it already in Genesis. What goes around comes around. So when Jacob was younger, he had a brother. His father Isaac preferred his brother.

So Jacob decided to deceive his father when it was blessing time. Esau was away. Jacob used animal skin to deceive his father so that he got the blessing of his father.

And then, a generation later, he has a favorite son, Joseph. So when his son Joseph is away, his other sons come to him and they deceive him with animal skin.

And he thinks that his son is dead. You reap what you sow. And so it is that these sons as tribal leaders by their own sin have determined consequences that are going to affect many generations to come.

[10 : 32] And it is a truth that we see in our society today. We see it in families, don't we? When a parent can't control their anger and they raise children who are damaged by that and don't know how to be parents themselves.

It's the lasting devastation of sin. When a husband has a one-night stand and his ongoing guilt gets in the way of his marriage and trust is completely destroyed with his wife, there's this lasting devastation to sin.

Perhaps at work if we tell a lie and it gets discovered and it's kind of marked on our record through our careers and we can't get rid of it. Maybe something that you might think of as more minor.

Perhaps you go out with some non-Christian friends for a drink. They're drinking loads. They're getting drunk. You're out with them and you get drunk with them and the next day once the hangover clears you might think not a lot's different but actually there is a lasting consequence to that among your friends because they will think things like Jesus isn't really that important.

Jesus obviously doesn't mean that much to our friend because he doesn't really change the way they live that much. Sin has these lasting consequences that we often can't control and reign back.

[12 : 03] Now the message of the Bible of course is that whatever we've done there is complete forgiveness available at the cross. The slate is completely wiped clean from God but we can still be in a position where in this life we are damaged or we see the damage of our sin and in some cases the effect can last for many years.

So that's a problem for us because this isn't just about Reuben and Simeon and Levi none of us are the people we ought to be. If you're tempted at the moment to treat an area of sin in your life lightly then be warned by what happened here to these boys to these men.

Picture Reuben and Simeon and Levi and be warned by the Bible. So what's God going to do about that? Because if that is sort of going to potentially mark our future it's pretty daunting.

Well the great news of the rest of the chapter is that God is still sovereign and committed to bless his people. So the next thing we see is the shepherd God of promise.

You see that in verse 15 as Jacob describes God. Look at his confidence in verse 15 of chapter 48 sorry verse 15. Jacob blessed Joseph and said may the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day the angel who has delivered me from all harm may he bless these boys may they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac and may they increase greatly on the earth.

[13 : 42] See what's going on Jacob reminds us here that this is the God of his father and his grandfather Abraham and Isaac we've seen that this is a deeply flawed family as we've looked at them over these chapters a family where there's favoritism and vengeance and spite and adultery and murder what's special about this family?

God's promise is what's special about them. God's chosen this family Abraham's descendants and promised that through Abraham's offspring God's going to put the world right.

It's the seedbed of the whole Bible fulfilled in Jesus and despite their sin God will keep his promise to Abraham a promise that Abraham's descendants will be a great nation they're going to live in a land they're going to be blessed and that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through them.

That's the promise for us as Christians today as we turn to God and we trust in him we know that our future is one of glorious hope because of what God promised to Abraham and the blessings for the other brothers here flesh that out for us as we had them read for us some of them are a bit odd

aren't they and you wonder what Benjamin would have thought as he was described as a ravenous wolf or what Dan made of being called a viper by the road that bites the heels of horses I can imagine thinking yeah is this good or is this bad I'm not sure but at the same time there are these glimpses of life in the promised land for them that was Canaan that they were going to go into centuries later but it's pointing ultimately to the new creation that we're waiting for just glimpses of where we'll be when Jesus returns so in verse 15 of chapter 49 we hear of a good resting place and a pleasant land that's what we need a good resting place in verse 13 a shore with a safe haven for ships in verse 20 a place of rich food with delicacies fit for a king just a picture of the future that awaits us when Jesus returns and puts the world right or he calls us home through death but we're not there yet and day by day today our lives might seem very tough and in that it's important to remember that Jacob had known God as his shepherd he says

God has been my shepherd all my life to this day and God is our shepherd today as well this is the first time in the Bible that God is called a shepherd and clearly for Jacob this is no kind of idealized romanticized view you know of this shepherd boy who's dressed very cleanly and the sheep just grazing and you look at these pastoral pictures of sheep in a valley and you think life looks so easy for a sheep but Jacob has described his life in chapter 47 we saw this last time my years have been few and difficult just imagine if that ends up the verdict on your life you get to the end of your life and the way you could best summarize it is my years have been few and difficult it's probably not what we want is it and so it's a great statement of faith from Jacob that in this life of difficulty he says God has been my shepherd right through this when his brother

[17:11] Esau wanted to kill him God was his shepherd when he spent 14 years as a slave working for his cruel master his uncle Laban God was his shepherd when he fled his home and his family and his land when he lost his favorite son and grieved his death for years when he lost his wife Rachel when he faced famine and he had to send his sons away because they were in danger of starvation God was his shepherd and as well as preserving Jacob he was transforming him it's so important for us to remember that today if we feel that we're in difficult years that we could say of our current stage of life it feels like my years are difficult or maybe it's something we have to store up for if there are times in the future when life gets very difficult God is our shepherd in that but it is hard for we have to remember that God cares much more about our character than our comfort and that's hard because

I care more about my comfort than my character so I need to submit myself to the shepherd who knows what's best for me he knows the future he walks through the valley of the shadow of death with us his rod and staff comfort us and he's working to transform us to make us more like Jesus Christ so can you see there's this tension in this passage and a tension woven through the Old Testament that you've got a bunch of people who are utterly broken they're deeply flawed even their greatest king David who's going to come commits adultery and murder and you've got a God who's warned us continually that sin has devastating consequences and yet you also have the same God shepherding his people and he keeps promising unconditionally that he will bless his people in the future and that all the nations of the world will be blessed through his people so you're left thinking how's God going to do that how can he keep making these unconditional promises when the people keep sinning well wonderfully

God gives us a glimpse here of how he's going to do that that's our third point we see the lion ruler of Judah I don't know if you noticed but two of the tribes get much more attention than any of the others and in both cases God is signaling to us that a leader is coming God's going to send a leader there's the blessing of Joseph we'll look at that one first in verses 22 to 26 in verse 22 Joseph is a fruitful vine a fruitful vine near a spring whose branches climb over a wall and then there's this shower of blessings promised for him and you see this importance of a ruler for the people at the end of verse 26 if you look down there let all these rest on the head of Joseph on the brow of the prince among his brothers the people needed one of the brothers to be a ruler because Joseph's leadership saved the family and it didn't just save the family it saved the world in this famine God gave Joseph this amazing meteoric rise to be in charge of Egypt and through his wisdom when there was the famine and people didn't have bread they could come to Egypt come to Joseph and he gave them grain he gave them life and Joseph is a shadow of the one God will send in the future Jesus is the true and better Joseph he takes up that language of verse 22 on himself I am the true vine you are the branches and he doesn't just offer out grain in a famine he says I am the bread of life whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty do

you see the shadows remember what happened with Joseph he was in Potiphar's house and Potiphar's wife wrongly falsely accuses him and he is condemned and he ends up in prison and then God exalts him to rule the nation but Jesus was the perfectly innocent man unjustly convicted wrongly accused crucified and then raised to life by God to rule the world

God is foreshadowing here in Joseph the one who will come and that when he dies mercilessly beaten and nailed naked to a cross he will bear the devastating consequences of sin so that God can keep his promise to bless his people so where's that saviour going to come from and what's he going to be like well he gets promised in the blessing to Judah that's the climax of this section it's verses 8 to 12 and this is a prophecy about Jesus Christ in verses 8 to 12 so he's victorious in verse 8 Judah your brothers will praise you your hand will be on the neck of your enemies he's majestic in verse 9 like a lion he crouches and lies down like a lioness who dares to rouse him see that picture of Jesus as a bit frightening there's this great bit in the lion the witch and the wardrobe where the children you know

[22 : 49] C.S. Lewis the writer was using Aslan the lion in the novel as a picture of Jesus and he saved the children but the children get warned at the end he's not like a tame lion he's wild you know he is good but he's wild he's not a tame lion and it's true of Jesus back in these verses he's the ruler of the world verse 10 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 I don't know what you think about this I think it's extraordinarily bold here in Genesis this promise here is God 4,000 years ago promising to this nomadic people that somebody in the line of Judah one of the sons will eventually rule the whole world there are other pictures in verse 11 he's prosperous he can wash his clothes in wine it's just a picture of his prosperity he's healthy in verse 12 with eyes darker than wine and then 2,000 years later

John one of Jesus' closest friends gets given this vision from God and the curtain is peeled back for John so that he can see what's going on in heaven and he sees a throne in heaven and he sees a scroll that will tell him the future in Revelation 4 and 5 and he's told see the lion of the tribe of Judah the root of David has triumphed he is able to open the scroll and he turns to the throne John in his vision to look at the lion and he sees standing in the center of the throne a slain lamb and the angels are worshipping him the lion of Judah the reason people are afraid at the moment in Glasgow and in the UK is because we turn politics into a god and we think that politics will solve our futures for us so when there's this uncertainty people are in a panic for us as Christians what an opportunity we have to show that we do have a peace that politics could never give us we've got a joy and a contentment and a security because we can tell ourselves even as we read the news on websites or we're watching it on TV we can tell ourselves the lion of the tribe of Judah has triumphed he is on the throne he is in charge of the future

I can trust God's promises because of him and as we finish we get a signal of how we respond to that in looking at Jacob the faithful example of Jacob the New Testament commends Jacob here in Hebrews 11 so we kind of know that's what we're supposed to do we're supposed to copy him because he's a man of faith and his blessings of the son started with this line gather round so that I can tell you what will happen in days to come I can tell you what will happen he's confident he trusts God's promises and there's a great picture of that trust in chapter 48 verse 21 just have a look at that what Jacob does he's called Israel here 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 one more ridge of land than to your brothers the ridge I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow Jacob is so convinced that God will keep his promise that he made to Jacob's grandfather that he's already parceling up the land in Canaan he's had to leave Canaan and come to Egypt but he gives Joseph that ridge of land because he knows that because God's promised that land it's as good as having the deeds already in your hands and I just wonder if we're being called to live like that today as Christians to be people who are so convinced that the new creation will be ours that we have a promised land coming where there'll be no more death or mourning or crying or pain anymore that we are willing to sacrifice for God joyfully today every time we make a sacrifice for God every time we do something that we wouldn't otherwise have done if we weren't a Christian it's an act of faith whether it's giving it's sort of it's not giving into temptation to sin or it's giving up our time perhaps committing to be at church on a Sunday if we wouldn't otherwise have come or to be in a growth group when we launch those as a commitment to a group of people to meet up with somebody who is struggling or isolated or lonely because you want to encourage them as a Christian every time we

do that we forego personal comfort and pleasure now and we are assured that we have eternity to enjoy the new creation so I wonder whether we can fix our minds on that future hope and be people who live sacrificially today for the Lord Jesus it's true of our money as well whenever we give money to gospel work when we give to St Silas

Jesus used that language of we're storing up treasures in heaven rather than treasures on earth and to do that we need the faith of Jacob a faith that says I know where I'm going God's promised the promised land God's promised us the new creation and we will spend forever there so our comfort now doesn't matter will we use our gifts in whatever way seems needed even if we find the job that we're asked to do or the thing that needs doing at church unfulfilling it's not quite what we wanted to do but we do it because we know we've got a promise of eternity to come in the promised land with the lion of Judah where we will enjoy being with God in everlasting rest let's pray together father in heaven we thank you for the warnings of your word that speak truth to us father help us to remember the devastating consequences of sin and we pray that you'll help us by your spirit to remember that when we are tempted that you would protect us from harming ourselves and others by turning away from you and we thank you that you are the God who has committed to us as your people to be our shepherd day by day and to be our future and we praise you and thank you that those promises do not depend on us in our performance for you have sent the lion of Judah thank you that he lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died that you raised him from the dead that we can come to him as the true vine and the bread of life and so we pray father God that you'll enable us by your spirit to follow Jacob's faithful example to live by faith in your promises that we might be of incredible use to you joyfully serving others and that through us you would bring many more to know you in Jesus name we ask

[31 : 06] Amen luld That's For to be