

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: *Genesis 48:8-20*

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SERMON: *“All My Life To This Day”*

(Acknowledgement to Tim Keller for his sermons/podcasts on “The Gospel According to Jacob” and The BibleProject for their overview of the Bible)

Today’s Scripture reading comes from Genesis 48, starting with verse 8. What we’re about to read is the last scene we have of Jacob’s life. Jacob – now called Israel – is approached by his son Joseph, along with Joseph’s two sons.

Genesis 48:8-20 When Israel saw the sons of Joseph, he asked, “Who are these?”

“They are the sons God has given me here,” Joseph said to his father.

Then Israel said, “Bring them to me so I may bless them.”

Now Israel’s eyes were failing because of old age, and he could hardly see. So Joseph brought his sons close to him, and his father kissed them and embraced them.

Israel said to Joseph, “I never expected to see your face again, and now God has allowed me to see your children too.”

Then Joseph removed them from Israel’s knees and bowed down with his face to the ground. And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel’s left hand and Manasseh on his left toward 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.

Then he blessed Joseph and said, “May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, 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 upon the earth.”

When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim’s head he was displeased; so he took hold of his father’s hand to move it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. Joseph said to him, “No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.”

But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations.” He blessed them that day and said,

“In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing:

‘May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.’”

So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

We’ve been tracking the life of **Jacob (series graphic)**, and wouldn’t you agree that this passage that I’ve just read appears to be the most uneventful of all the passages we’ve looked at so far.

The first week of this study - back in February – there was The Great Deception. Jacob put’s on this disguise and was asked this question by his father: **“Who are you?”**

Genesis 27:19 Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn...please sit up...so that you may give me your blessing.”

Jacob’s father was blind, remember? And so Jacob deceived his father in order to receive a blessing that was to go to Esau. Would Jacob be able to pull it off before Esau returns from the field?

The second week we saw the deceiver get deceived. Laban was looking to get Jacob to marry his oldest daughter Leah, rather than the younger Rachel that Jacob’s heart is

really set on. Will *Laban* be able to pull it off before Jacob realizes that he's marrying Leah and not Rachel?

Last week Jacob find's himself wrestling with God, and at one point he's asked...

Genesis 32:27 “What is your name?” “Jacob,” he answered. (And he had said to God: “*I will not let you go unless you bless me.*”)

And this was a turning point in the life of Jacob. Before he pretended to be Esau, desperate for the blessing of his father. Now he is Jacob, and realizes it's God's blessing he's needed all along.

This morning's message is titled, **All My Life to This Day**, and while today's passage may lack some of the intrigue of previous passages, nevertheless, in this passage God is looking to help you (and myself) change the way you view your life, and change the way you view the world. And so let's take a look at what's going on during this last scene of Jacob's life.

Let's get started by looking at...

1. WHAT'S HAPPENING

When we left off last week, the sun was rising above Jacob as he was leaving Peniel.

Genesis 33:1 Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men...

And just to show how far we need to go even *after* a life changing encounter with God, Jacob sets up his family up in the order in which he is willing to lose them. The two maidservants and their sons (which are also his sons) up here in the front...Leah, you and your sons (also Jacob's sons) are next...and Rachel, you and your only son Joseph, my two favorites, you're back here in the rear. And then Jacob himself went on ahead, approached his brother and bowed down before him.

Genesis 33:4 But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept.

This is remarkable...Esau is clearly not holding onto any bitterness from Jacob's act of deception 20 years prior. **They reconcile**, and Genesis 33 ends with the two of them departing in peace.

A little later in Genesis 35, we read of how Jacob's beloved wife **Rachel dies giving birth** to his 12th and final son, and not long after that, **Jacob's father Isaac dies as well**. And just a side note, how many of us are amazed that this man was still alive? I mean, 20 years ago, when Jacob dressed up as Esau in order to deceive his father, we envision a man who's time is short, right? 20 years later, and this man was still alive.

And then much of what follows in the later chapters of Genesis is focused on Jacob's 11th son, Joseph. Jacob is **told** – by his sons - **that Joseph is dead**. Many years later he is **told** – again by his sons – **that Joseph is alive**. They are **reunited**...and Jacob ends up moving his entire family to Egypt. By the time we get to this morning's passage, Jacob's been **living in Egypt for the past 17 years**.

And so there's a brief summary of what's been happening leading up to what I described earlier as a relatively tame event compared to other events in Jacob's life. But you know what's really fascinating?

Some of you are aware that in the New Testament book of Hebrews, there is this chapter – chapter 11 – where there are these little summaries of what numerous individuals did “by faith” throughout the Old Testament...By faith Noah did this, and by faith, Abraham did that. By faith Isaac did this, and by faith Moses did that. What I find fascinating is what is said about Jacob:

Hebrews 11:21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

Don't you find it interesting that of all the events that we know about in Jacob's life, that this is the one that gets mentioned here in Hebrews 11? I would think the fact that he wrestled with *and* was blessed by God would have been worth mentioning here, but it's not. And so **what is it about this passage that makes it the triumphant moment of Jacob's life?**

So... when I read a passage, I will then ask myself...

2. WHAT CATCHES MY ATTENTION?

Hopefully you are do the same, so what is it in *this* passage that catches your eye? Two things that I'd like to point out, the first being...

A. Jacob's Awareness of God's Grace

...and how this awareness changes the way he views his life. We see it here in verse 15...

Genesis 48:15b "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,..."

It was just a few weeks ago Pastor Shaun took us through Psalm 23, which began with what words? "The LORD is my shepherd..." Same thing that Jacob is saying here, but what you may not know is that when Jacob says this, it's *the first time in the Scriptures* that God is referred to as a shepherd.

Which means Jacob is looking back over his life and sees how he, like sheep, was prone to wander and do life his way. Thus, the deception and lies and manipulation.

But now during this final scene from his life, he's acknowledging just how much he's *needed* God's grace, that is, His guidance and His care...more than that, he knows that he has actually *experienced* it.

He talks about **"...the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day."**

Jacob is saying that God has been watching over him, extending grace to him all the days of his life. Now think about that. What do we know about Jacob's life? Let's start a list:

Raised by a father who didn't love him.

Worked 20 years for a man who exploited him and manipulated his wages.

Tricked into marrying a woman he didn't love.

Married a woman he did love, but who died within a few years while giving birth.

His sons lead him to believe his favorite son, Joseph, is dead, sending him into a state of deep depression.

Now just look at that list. So much tragedy and hardship, and yet Jacob was able to look back over his life and say, at every moment, at every place, I was under the care of a loving shepherd... *"the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day."*

It's a nice picture isn't it, kind of reminds us of those **images** that artists will sometimes use, showing Jesus bringing home a lost sheep by carrying it over his shoulders. This would come from the parable that Jesus tells about how this shepherd leaves his 99 sheep in order to go after this one sheep that was lost, and after finding it hoists the sheep up on his back and together with joy they return back to the flock, back to the 99.

But the reality is, while the shepherd might be joyous, the sheep that has just been found, not so much. I was listening to this account of a former shepherd, and here's what he had to say about finding lost sheep: *"A sheep is a stupid animal, they follow one another and lose their direction continually, unlike a cat or a dog. But even when they are found, they are never happy to be found. It is extremely difficult to round up a lost sheep and bring it home unless you have a dog to scare it. The lost sheep rushes to and fro, so that even when you find it, you must seize it, cast it down, tie it's four legs together, and put it over your shoulder and carry it home struggling."*

What he's saying is that the sheep will not feel loved even while it's being loved...it won't feel safe even as it's being made safe.

And so Jacob sees this as something that has taken place in *his* life. He's able to look back over his life and think about all those times and all those places when he thought that God had abandoned him, or God was punishing him...seized, cast down, tied down...and he comes to the end of his life and he is able to say, **"I was wrong."**

He was my shepherd...all those times, all those places...all my life to this day. Jacob may not have felt loved or cared for by God most of the time, or maybe even any of the time. But he sees that he was wrong, and it changed the way he viewed his life.

The other thing is, **Jacob's awareness of God's grace not only changed the way he viewed his life, it changed the way he viewed the world.** We see this by looking at something else that probably caught your attention, and that would be...

B. The Crossed Hands

Genesis 48:14 But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, even though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the first born.

In a way, this scene is both comical and troubling. Comical because back in verse 10 we're told that Israel's eyes were failing, he could hardly see because of his old age. And so here's Joseph, *"Boys, I need you to be very careful when we go to grandpa, because you know he's old and won't be able to see you very well. Be very careful when you're up on his lap and just don't squirm. I need you to be on your best behavior."*

And so it's all good, they get there and Joseph places the boys on Jacob's lap, and it's all very nice, he kisses them and loves on them and then Joseph removes them from Jacob's lap, and places Manasseh the oldest - the son who will get a greater share of the inheritance, the son who will be favored above all other sons - Joseph places him in front of Jacob's right hand...because the right hand symbolizes the position of privilege.

Are you familiar with the term “Right hand man?” If you’re called somebody’s right hand man, it means you’re that person’s indispensable helper. In the book of Romans, Paul writes that Jesus is interceding for us, and as He does, where is He seated? At the right hand of God the Father. In the book of Acts, as Steven was being killed, he looked up and saw a vision of Jesus standing where? At the right hand of God.

So Joseph knows what he’s doing when he places Manasseh where he does, in front of Jacob’s right hand. Ephraim goes over here on Jacob’s left. And Joseph is probably saying, *“Okay father, you can begin with the blessing, everyone is now in place.”*

And Jacob starts in on the blessing, but before he does, he crosses his hands. Placing his right hand on Ephraim’s head.

Genesis 48:17 When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim’s head, he was displeased; so he took hold of his father’s hand to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head.

Now I think most of us know what it’s like when we are dealing with someone who is older and more likely to get mixed up, more prone to confusion. This is what Joseph thinks he’s dealing with, it irritates him, displeases him... *“Oh father, you’re all mixed up, this is how you want to do it.”*

You see, Joseph was looking at life like most other people at that time, that is, there is a certain understanding when it comes to people’s value. There those who “matter” more than others. Those who are valued more than others. There are those who are “up here” and those who are “down there.” Up here are boys not girls...the older boys, not the younger boys...wealthy families, not poor families.

You see, **Joseph is looking at life through the lens of this world**...like most people do. But while you may not have picked up on this, **Jacob is looking at life through the lens of God’s grace.** And so he’s not mixed up at all. He’s not confused. He says to Joseph, *“I know, my son, I know.”* I know exactly what I’m doing.

While we don't know exactly how God's Spirit is working to guide him through this blessing, what Jacob is doing here is consistent not with the ways of the world, but consistent with the ways of God.

Church, are you familiar with and have you come to understand what is meant when we talk about **“God's Upside Down Kingdom”**? It is a continual, consistent theme that runs throughout the entire Bible.

If you know your Bible, more than that, if you're a follower of Jesus, you know what is meant when we talk about God's upside down kingdom. Some examples that you may be familiar with...

When it comes to who will give birth to the Messianic seed bearer, the world would look to beautiful Rachel rather than weak-eyed Leah. But God turns that thinking upside down.

When Gideon is about to go into battle, the world would say call up your army of 32,000 men and go into battle. But God turns that thinking upside down by having Gideon go into battle with 300 men, in order to show that it is He and not Israel's army that holds ultimate power.

When someone is needed to go up against Goliath, the world would look to the biggest, strongest warrior among the Israelites, but God turns that thinking upside down by working through this shepherd boy named David. And those examples just scratch the surface.

And somehow Jacob seems to get this. His experience of God's grace in his life impacts not only the way he sees his life, but how he now views the world.

Though the world would say that it should be Manasseh who gets the “right hand” blessing...Jacob's crossing of the hands shows in a very subtle but powerful way that he understand the upside down nature of God's work in this world. Jacob will not be bound by the world's ways, but by God's ways.

I also said a moment ago that this particular section is not only comical in a way, but in all seriousness, it is also troubling. This came up last week when I shared with the other pastors the first draft of this sermon. We talked about Manasseh, and “what’s he thinking” as Jacob and Joseph are having this back and forth?

We know that God is not saying that Manasseh isn’t important...that *he* doesn’t matter, than *he* doesn’t have value. I’ve come to see that even in the midst of God working, revealing, teaching...it is rarely clean, often complex, with questions that have no clear answers...but none of that changes the fact that God’s grace is extended to everyone. Including Manasseh. Including me. Including you.

So just to summarize, what we have here in this passage is Jacob’s reflection on the grace of God, and how it impacted how he viewed his life, and also how he viewed the world.

What do you think that God is looking to bring about in your life through our study of this passage? In other words, I would like for you to be asking yourself...

3. WHAT’S MY NEXT STEP?

For some in here or out there, your first step might be to **Recognize Your Need of God’s Grace**. I get this, I can recall a time in my life when I felt no need of God’s grace, that is, I didn’t recognize any need of Jesus.

But this indifference to Jesus led to a life that at times could be described as empty, sometimes chaotic and stressful, there were good times to be sure, but rarely any sense of peace or contentment.

But even though I wasn’t aware, God was watching over me. Different people came into my life and numerous events unfolded in my life which ultimately led to me recognizing my need of God’s grace, and how it comes to me through Jesus.

I would just say, be open to people in your life and events in your life which God is using to help you recognize your need of His grace, which comes to you through Jesus.

Because while you may not feel His love and you may not feel His care...He does love you and He does care about you. My prayer is that one day, perhaps this day, your eyes and your heart will open up to that truth.

And if you're in here or out there doubting the existence of God or your need of His grace, but would be willing to talk about it, I would welcome the opportunity to sit down with you, hear your story and see where you're at. My contact information is easily found on our church website, and so call or email me if you'd like to continue this conversation.

For those of you who have already recognized your need of God's grace, your need of Jesus, perhaps your next step is to **Reflect On Your Experience of God's Grace**. That is, think about how His grace has changed the way you view your life.

This is what Jacob was doing in today's passage, reflecting back on that night where he wrestled with God, and how through this experience, this wrestling, he was delivered from all harm.

You know, once we recognize our need of Jesus, what happens? We begin to wrestle with God, right? Once we decide to follow Jesus, there are some changes we don't mind making...joining a church, becoming active in that church.

But there are plenty of changes we don't want to make. For some of us, maybe it's how we handle conflict. For some of us, it's how we view our money. For some of us, it's how we view those who don't look like us or think like us.

But what helps bring about change is when we take time to reflect on the grace God has extended to us. How He brought this person into my life. How this particular event was so impactful and life-changing. And those rare occasions when He spoke to us in a way that was so direct and so clear that we knew that He was with us.

And when we reflect back over these life events, we see that God didn't just deliver us from harm, but we found ourselves drawing closer to Jesus and doing life better. The

next step for some of us, is to take a walk this week – just you and God – and reflect back over your life and how you have experienced His grace. And how it has impacted how you view your life.

Last suggestion, for some of you, perhaps your next step is to **Allow God's Grace to Change How You View the World.**

As recipients of God's grace and as followers of Jesus, we've been invited to active participants **God's upside-down kingdom.** And this is beautiful, because not only is it right, by actively participating with God and living by His values, we're able to live lives that are distinct, that stand out, and help us show Jesus to a world living by misplaced values.

Misplaced values, such as striving for power, personal rights over the good of the community, emphasis on wealth and popularity and appearance. And if these were the values of Jesus, I hope that I would follow Him down that path wholeheartedly.

Except...those are not the value of Jesus, are they? As I read the Gospels and observe the life that Jesus led and the things that He taught, there's nothing that tells me I should be looking to acquire power, nothing about elevating my status or improving my appearance. Nothing about guarding my personal rights, in fact, what I'm to do just the opposite.

Because what I do see is Jesus talking about the virtue of humility, giving up our rights, and serving others. It's a totally upside down way to view the world.

But Jesus didn't just teach it, He led the way. Giving up His rights, humbling Himself and serving me when I gave Him absolutely no reason to do that. And because of what He has done for me, and because of what I see Him teaching me, I have no choice but to view the world through the lens of grace.

No doubt the way of Jesus appears and is upside down to the world's view of life, what matters, who's valuable, what's important. But I can't deny that this upside down

Kingdom of His is found throughout the Bible, from beginning to end. And so I want it to be found in my life as well. Because I want to be part of His story. I don't want to just read about it from the outside, I want to live it.

My hope and prayer is that the Church – *His* Church – will want to live it as well, and by doing so, be able to show others and explain *to others* the upside down way that God works.

Okay, perhaps this was not such an uneventful passage after all. I hope now we're able to see why this is depicted as the triumphant moment of Jacob's life. While it didn't carry the drama of some of the other scenes of Jacob's life, it's message is critically important. My prayer is that you will take the time today, this week, many times in the future, to reflect on the God who has been *your* shepherd... all your life...to this day, and He will impact how you see yourself and how you see the world.

PRAYER