

Changing Your Future

Genesis 49:1-12. 22-26

6/22/08

Intro

As we near the end of the book of Genesis we come to the end of Jacob's life. He is now 147 years old and the years of his life have been unpleasant. As was common in that culture, he drew his children around him. It was common to give his children a blessing, to declare the inheritance and to give his heart to each of them.

But here, Jacob draws his children so that he can speak words of prophecy over them. This is one of the first places in scripture we see a prophetic word spoken.

But notice that the prophecies concerning them had everything to do with how they lived their lives. Is there a connection between our past and our future?

There are some great insights for each of us as we see these prophecies give lessons for our lives today.

I. **How We Live Today Matters**

- In verse 2 it says, "Gather together and hear, O sons of **Jacob**; and listen to **Israel** your father." He uses both names Jacob and Israel. As you look at his life you realize that he had struggled with being Jacob, the heel-snatcher, or Israel, governed by God.
- In that culture it was common that the oldest would receive the greatest blessing, so he begins with Reuben, but it is not a blessing he gives.

A. We're writing our legacy now

- Reuben was the first born, the beginning of Jacobs's strength; preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.
- But he was as *uncontrolled as water*, Jacob said. In other words, everything he did was done for himself. He even mentions his great failure, that he defiled his own father's bed by sleeping with his father's concubine.
- Apparently, he tried to overlook it, tried to minimize it, never seeking repentance, never seeking change. That's it; he passes over Reuben and continues on to the other brothers.

Illus – as a pastor, I have the privilege of doing a lot of graveside services. And it's interesting what is often written on tombstones, but the most important part is what's behind the little dash between the year of your birth and the year of your death.

Illus – whenever my mom would visit her relatives back in Arkansas, she made a point of visiting the cemetery where her father was buried. She would then walk through the cemetery to see what other people had written on their tombstones. She started noticing a common theme. Finally, she stopped, pointed with her cane and said, "When I'm gone you can put anything on my tombstone but, "Gone but Not Forgotten." The family started teasing that they were going to write, "Anything But – Gone but Not Forgotten." They also saw one that said, Mother, Wife, Grandmother, etc and mom asked, "What do you think of that one?" My sister responded, "I don't like it." "Why not?" she asked. "Because, it doesn't say 'friend.'" On my mother's tombstone, we wrote, "Our mother, our friend."

- How we live today matters. We are writing our legacy right now. Reuben was self serving, everything was done for himself. It's a question of the heart.

Illus – if someone were to describe my life 30 years ago, they would have had to have said, “Construction in process, please excuse the mess.”

The change that God brings is the change from doing everything for ourselves, to making a difference in other people's lives.

You know, for example, that those who serve so faithfully in children's ministry are doing it to make a difference in those children's lives.

- We see the grace of God in Reuben's legacy, by the way. The tribe of Reuben is listed amongst the witnesses for Christ and Reuben's name is on one of the gates of the New Jerusalem.

B. Master your anger

- Simeon and Levi are next in line, but Jacob passes over them as well. Because in their anger they slew men and in their self -will they lamed oxen.
- The point that Jacob is remembering was a sad story. Their sister, Dinah, had been raped by a man named Shechem, from the town of Shechem. Simeon and Levi, in their anger, took vengeance on all of the men of the city and killed them all.

- In verse 6-7 he makes it clear that the problem is their anger and self-will.
- Simeon and Levi become powerful examples of why we must be masters over our anger.
- Everyone gets hot in the head sometimes, but blessed is the one who keeps control of it.

Proverbs 1:19, A man of great anger shall bear the penalty, for if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again.

Proverbs 29:11, A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back.

James 1:19-20, This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

Illus – There it is a story of a pastor who was building a shed next to his house. A neighbor boy came by and stood watching. The youngster didn't say a word, so the pastor kept on working, thinking the boy would leave, but he didn't. "Trying to pick up some pointers on building things?" the pastor asked. "No," the boy replied, "I'm just waiting to hear what a preacher says when he hits his thumb with a hammer."

C. Do something about your future

- Next, Jacob turns to Judah, and here the tone of Jacob's prophecy changes completely. It is to do that that he gives the scepter of authority. It is Judah who will rise up above his brothers.

- The amazing part of Judah’s story is how much Judah changed. Judah had moral failure and Judah was even the one who suggested that Joseph be sold as a slave.
- But it was also Judah who offered his life in exchange for the life of Benjamin. In fact, when Joseph saw Judah’s willingness to sacrifice himself, it touched his heart deeply and he wept.

App – Judah’s Life is a powerful illustration of a profound truth; you can’t do anything about your past, but you definitely can do something about your future.

Psalms 37:37, Mark the blameless man, and behold the upright; for the man of peace will have a posterity.

- As we discussed last week, it is easy to trace the troubles of Jacob’s family to Jacob himself, *but do dysfunctional families have to repeat themselves?*
- Let the dysfunctional nature of our past end here.
- The answer is found in Jesus himself. He takes the curse of our past couple of himself.

Galatians 3:13, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”

- It’s interesting to see the connection between Judah and Benjamin in the future. Here, Judah offers his life in exchange for Benjamin, and many years later it will be the tribes of Judah and Benjamin together that make up the southern kingdom of Israel. Only those two tribes will

stand faithfully, while the 10 northern tribes wandered away from God.

II. Godly Character is a Great Blessing

- Move to verses 22-26, here Jacob gives the prophecy regarding Joseph.
- Joseph stands head and shoulders above his brothers in regard to his godliness, his faithfulness of character do all the difficulties of life.
- He is a powerful example of what a great blessing it is to have godly character.

A. Let God be your spring

- Jacob said that Joseph was a fruitful bough by a spring.

Illus – much of the Middle East has done what is called dry farming for many years. This is a process whereby seed is planted and the results of the harvest are completely dependent up on how much rain falls. Unfortunately, very little rain falls in the Middle East and so the crops are often very sparse.

But Israel has undertaken a water project of pumping the fresh water from the Sea of Galilee throughout Israel, even down to Beersheba, and so the desert is bearing fruit.

Illus – when we were growing up, we used to bury large cans next to our tomato plants and fill them with water, we would always have an abundance of tomatoes, even in the harshest summers.

- In verse 24, it's clear that it is the hands of the Mighty One that are on Joseph. That is the key.
- Let God be the spring of the water of life, and you will see a great blessing in your life, and the fruitfulness will even extend over the wall so others can enjoy the fruits of your blessing as well.

Illus – when fruit hangs over a wall, it's free for anyone to enjoy.

- But what is the capacity of the container? That will determine how much of the spring of the water of life you take in.

Psalm 23:5-6, You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

App – some have just a teacup of capacity, some have a 5 gallon bucket, some are like a rain barrel overflowing with blessing.

John 4:14, “but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”

B. Let God hold you back

- In verses 23-24, Jacob tells everyone, “The archers bitterly attacked him, and shot at him and harassed him; but his bow remained firm.”

- It was the hands of the Mighty One that held him back. In other words, it was his relationship to God that made all the difference in his life.

Illus – when Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him, his response was, “How can I do this and sin against my God?”

- Joseph had many arrows shot at him in his life. Can you imagine what it would be like to have 10 older brothers?
- Imagine the hurt of all that he went through; he pleaded with his brothers, and they would not listen. How it must’ve hurt when he was falsely accused.

App- the trouble with the arrows is that they can be shot from a distance.

- But we must also see that Joseph did not shoot back. He had the power, he had the opportunity, but he would not shoot back. That is the character of God within him.

Exodus 14:14, “The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.”

- Revenge pleases the flesh, but it does not please the spirit. That’s the key; we can’t afford to do anything that draws us away from God.

Psalm 73:28, But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all Your works.

App – At your right hand are pleasures forevermore, says the scripture. That’s the key for every one of us.