

Genesis 48 – Jacob's Deathbed Perspective

There was a very rich businessman who was near death. Having worked hard all his life, he desperately wanted to take some of his wealth with him to heaven and was eventually given special permission by God to bring one suitcase.

Overjoyed, the businessman gathered his largest suitcase, filled it with pure gold bars and placed it beside his bed.

Shortly afterwards the man died and when arrived in Heaven he was greeted by St. Peter. Seeing the suitcase, St. Peter said:

"wait, I must check its contents before letting it through."



So St. Peter opened the suitcase to inspect the worldly items that the businessman found too precious to leave behind. As the lid sprang back to reveal the gold, St. Peter exclaimed: "You brought pavement?"

As we grow older, our perspective changes. To a baby, cash is of no value. A baby would rather be loved by its mother instead of having one million dollars.



But as some babies become adults, one million dollars is more valuable than having someone love them.



Age changes our perspective. Sometimes a person's perspective on life can grow to be cynical and pessimistic. For others, their perspective on life can grow to point where they are actually grateful for the suffering they have endured.

Jacob is an example of the latter. As Jacob was nearing death, it's clear that Jacob had an appreciation for God's faithfulness that he didn't have earlier in his life.

We need not be at death's door to view life as Jacob did. What we must do is grasp the reasons for Jacob's changed outlook and apply them to our lives now.

To help us understand, let's look carefully at the final events of Jacob's life as recorded by Moses in Genesis 48.

48 After this, Joseph was told, "Behold, your father is ill." So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. ² And it was told to Jacob, "Your son Joseph has come to you." Then Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed. ³ And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, ⁴ and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.'

In verse 3, the name "God Almighty" is used. In the original Hebrew text, the name of God used was "El Shaddai".

אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי

Some bible scholars and commentators believe it is a mistake to translate “Shaddai” into the English word “Almighty”. This is because the primary name of “Elohim” sufficiently signifies almightiness.

According to these bible critics, “All-sufficient” would be far better to express the characteristic use of the name “Shaddai” in scripture.

So in the English translation, instead of stating “God Almighty” the text should really read “God all-sufficient”, according to these critics.

Because he is all-sufficient, God not only enriches but makes fruitful. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the first occurrence of the name “El Shaddai” in Genesis 17: 1 - 8.

To Abraham, a man 99 years of age, and “as good as dead” as Abraham is referred to in Hebrews 11:12, God said

“I am El Shaddai; walk before me...that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.”

As the all sufficient provider of fruitfulness, El Shaddai will use punishment and suffering to refine us. The hand of El Shaddai falls upon Jacob, but not to inflict torture for the sake of God’s enjoyment.

Instead, God used the suffering in Jacob’s life to purify Jacob unto greater fruitfulness.

Jacob is now dying. But as Jacob looks back upon his life, his perspective has radically changed. Jacob is now grateful for the times of suffering in his life.

This is a dramatic contrast in Jacob’s life. Remember the time when Jacob met Pharaoh? It was 17 years earlier. Jacob at that time told Pharaoh

“The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning.” Genesis 47: 9

That was Jacob's perspective from the palace of Pharaoh. But now, standing in the proverbial graveyard of his ancestors and facing imminent death, Jacob's testimony is one of deep faith and joyful gratitude for God's faithfulness and care through all the days of his life.

But how could Jacob believe that God blessed him richly with any sincerity? Jacob's life had been one long sequence of sorrows. He had antagonized his brother and deceived his father.

He had to leave home, never again to see his mother alive.

He was forced to live with an uncle who was nearly as deceptive as he and to take four wives rather than just Rachel, the one of his choice.

His wives fought with other over him, and his children hated one another.

His daughter was raped; his oldest son had slept with his concubine.

He was deprived of his favorite son Joseph.

A famine forced Jacob to leave the land of promise.

Jacob's life had been full of sorrow!

Yet Jacob sat up in his death bed, and proclaimed:

God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, ⁴ and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.' Genesis 48: 3 – 4

Jacob's perspective changed when he understood later in life that God was his Shepherd. Jacob had come to realize that God was present during all of Jacob's sufferings.

And while our Shepherd "makes us lie down in green pastures" (Psalm 23:2), He also is with us as we "walk through the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4).

Jacob has come to see that every tragic event in his life was a part of the will of God. Jacob now rightfully understood that El Shaddai was guiding him and shaping him through adversity.

Starting in verse 5, we see a grateful Jacob now being used by God to bless Joseph.

⁵ And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh (ma-nas se) shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. ⁶ And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. ⁷ As for me, when I came from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).”

Joseph was the father of 2 sons he had with his wife, Asenath (as en-ath), the daughter of an Egyptian priest.

Through his Egyptian wife, Joseph became the father of 2 sons – Manasseh (ma-nas se) and Ephraim. The name of the first born,

Manasseh (ma-nas se), means “one who forgets”.

Joseph named his first born “Manasseh” (ma-nas se) because his son made Joseph forget all his hardship and forget his brothers.

The second born son was named Ephraim, which means double fruit. Joseph named his son Ephraim because God had made Joseph fruitful in the land of Egypt.

The very same land that previously imprisoned and had enslaved Joseph for 13 years.

Jacob now decides to adopt Joseph’s two sons. The reason is because Jacob wanted Joseph to inherit all the rights of a first born child. In chronological order, the actual first born of Jacob was his son Reuben. Reuben’s mother was Leah.

Reuben should have inherited the first born birthrights, but because Reuben had sexual relations with his father Jacob’s concubine (Genesis 35:22), Jacob decided to strip Reuben of his birthright (Genesis 49:4).

After Reuben, the next two sons in chronological order for the birthright were Simeon and Levi. But both of these sons were guilty of the mass murder that occurred in Shechem in revenge over the rape of their sister Dinah (Genesis 34:25).

By adopting Manasseh (ma-nas se) and Ephraim, Jacob is replacing his first two sons, Reuben and Simeon, with Joseph’s first two sons. Now, Manasseh (ma-nas se) and Ephraim would each receive one portion of inheritance.

And because Joseph is the father of Manasseh (ma-nas se) and Ephraim, Joseph would receive a double portion of inheritance from his father Jacob.

Now this may seem like “slight of hand” on Jacob’s part to strip Rueben and Simeon of their first born rights. But when you think about it, a legitimate case can be made for Joseph receiving the first born rights.

Joseph is the first born son through Jacob’s wife Rachel. Rachel was Jacob’s favorite wife. This is why Rachel’s death was mentioned in verse 7.

Now that Jacob has adopted Manasseh (ma-nas se) and Ephraim, Jacob now wants to bless them before he dies.

⁸ When Israel saw Joseph’s sons, he said, “Who are these?” ⁹ Joseph said to his father, “They are my sons, whom God has given me here.” And he said, “Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them.” ¹⁰ Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. So Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. ¹¹ And Israel said to Joseph, “I never expected to see your face; and behold, God has let me see your offspring also.” ¹² Then Joseph removed them from his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. ¹³ And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel’s left hand, and Manasseh (ma-nas se) in his left hand toward Israel’s right hand, and brought them near him. ¹⁴ And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh (ma-nas se), crossing his hands (for Manasseh (ma-nas se) was the firstborn). ¹⁵ And he blessed Joseph and said,

“ The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day,
¹⁶ the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys;
and in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers
Abraham and Isaac;
and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.”

Joseph’s father, Israel, doesn’t recognize Manasseh (ma-nas se) and Ephraim when they are brought to him by Joseph. Israel’s eyesight is failing along with his health.

Israel is near death, yet it is important to Israel to bless these two boys. Why?

The book of Hebrews gives us insight to the importance of this blessing. We read in Hebrews 11:21:

By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. Hebrews 11:21

Israel understood that the blessings he gave to Manasseh (ma-nas se) and Ephraim would eventually come to pass. These blessings were prophetic. Just like the prophetic blessings Israel had received from his father, Isaac.

The fact that Israel was dying shows he knew he would die before God's promises would be fulfilled. Yet, Israel believed God was able to keep His promises, and Israel did not hesitate to give prophetic blessings to the two sons of Joseph.

Israel worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff, he leaned on the top of his staff showing the weakness of age. But Israel knew as he worshipped, that in these blessings he was speaking the Word of God.

This is an example of faith concerning future things. This blessing given by Israel is a testimony to his strong faith in El Shaddai, the all sufficient God.

The same God that promised to make the offspring of Abraham grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.

By the way, do you realize that every born again believer is an offspring of Abraham? We read in Galatians:

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. Galatians 3:29

That's exciting to think about. Just as Abraham was rewarded for his faith in God, we too are rewarded for our faith in Jesus. God has promised to bless us not only for today, but in the future for all eternity. I say bring it on! Amen?

Now something happens to Joseph during the blessings given to Manasseh (ma-nas se) and Ephraim. Joseph attempts to correct his father Israel.

¹⁷ When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. ¹⁸ And Joseph said to his father, "Not this way, my father; since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head." ¹⁹ But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations." ²⁰ So he blessed them that day, saying,

“ By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying,
' God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.' ”

Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.

When Joseph saw that his father was blessing Ephraim over Manasseh (ma-nas se), he protested.



But Israel's words in verse 19, "I know, my son, I know" expressed the confidence of Israel's faith. Israel was blessing according to God's divine plan, not according to normal custom.

The younger being blessed over the older is a theme we see throughout the book of Genesis. God chose Seth over Cain; Shem over Japheth; and Isaac over Ishmael.

And, of course, Israel remembered what had happened many years earlier with his brother Esau. Israel had learned that in spite of what Esau the first born had attempted to do, God had blessed Israel, the younger.

Israel now carried this forward to Joseph's sons. Through Israel, God chose the younger Ephraim over the older Manasseh (ma-nas se).

And years later Ephraim became a leading tribe in the Northern Kingdom, much superior to the tribe of Manasseh (ma-nas se), as Israel had predicted in verse 19.

Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations Genesis 48:19

The scriptures don't reveal any earthy reason why Ephraim should be placed above Manasseh (ma-nas se), but this is why Israel's actions had great meaning.

While society may have concluded, for practical reasons, to assign privileges according to the order of birth, God is not bound to such rules. God is not obliged to act "traditionally" or according to our expectations.

That is the prerogative of a God who is sovereign. Israel, at the end of life, has come to see this and has symbolically given testimony to his grasp of the principle of divine selection.

Having given priority to Ephraim, the younger, Israel now turns again to Joseph to give him yet another blessing before the other sons are called to his bedside:

21 Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your fathers. 22 Moreover, I have given to you rather than to your brothers one mountain slope that I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow."

Although Israel was dying in Egypt, he was convinced that God would take Israel and his sons back to the promised land of Canaan and eventually raise all of them with new physical bodies.

Because of his faith in God's promises, Israel gives to Joseph an extra portion of inheritance. This portion is the land of Shechem.

In Joshua 24:32 we read learn that Joseph was buried in Shechem and this portion of land became an inheritance to the descendants of Joseph.

As we have studied this morning in Genesis 48, we see the evidence of Israel's spiritual transformation. What is amazing to observe is that transformation didn't really begin in Israel's life until he was after the age of 130!

The spiritual transformation of Israel after the age of 130 teaches us there is no spiritual retirement.

I must ask you who are Christians, are you really growing? Christianity is not like civil service—the more time you spend, the better it is assumed you are at your job and thus the more you can expect to be paid.

Christians do not grow automatically. Growth and maturity are not merely matters of time.

No, spiritual growth and maturity are matters of discipleship. If you are not growing in Christian character, then you are becoming blind and forgetful and unfruitful. You're setting yourself up for a fall.

The apostle Peter explains this in his 2nd epistle found in the Bible. As Peter is writing this letter, probably from his prison cell, he knows he will be dying soon.

Just like Joseph's father Israel who also knew he would be dying soon.



And also like Israel, Peter's isn't complaining about how unjust life is. Peter isn't questioning why God allowed Peter to experience suffering and hardship.

Instead, in the last days he has on this earth, Peter is instructing his fellow believers on what is most important.

Each of us should take these words of Peter to heart, and seek to obey them by God's grace and to His glory.

1 Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

² May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. ¹¹ For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1: 1 – 10

Spiritual growth and maturity are matters of discipleship. Real transformation starts with faith. We don't supply the faith. Faith is given to us from God. But faith is something we can build upon if we are willing to make the effort.

Once we have faith, the apostle Peter refers to 7 character qualities every believer should have (ref: 2 Peter 1: 3 -11):

These qualities are similar to the ingredients in a cake recipe where all the ingredients are needed, but they should be added in the proper order.

Virtue

Having faith in God can lead to having virtue, which means a moral power. When we by faith understand that God wants to conform us to the image of Jesus, we should desire to take what God is offering us.

Having virtue means we now desire to emulate Jesus in our own lives to the praise and glory of God.

Knowledge

Having virtue leads to knowledge which, in this case, means insight and understanding with the ability to discern. Our minds can only be transformed with the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We gain this knowledge by allowing the Holy Spirit to communicate to us through our personal study of the Bible.

Self-control

Having our minds transformed leads us to self-control; which involves disciplined moderation in all things. As unbelievers, we were enslaved by our physical appetites.

But as believers, the Holy Spirit can deliver us from the bondage to the flesh. Using self-control, we can master the flesh and make it our servant.

Steadfastness

Having self control leads to steadfastness, which involves perseverance in trials. Perseverance is the commitment to suffer in the short term in order to experience glory for eternity.

The steadfastness we show in our trials is evidence of our faith that God will reward us one day in his Kingdom.

Godliness

Patience leads to Godliness, which means reverence for spiritual things. Our Godliness is something we practice in our day-to-day walk. We are to put off the old way of life and put on the new.

Things like anger, wrath, malice, slander, lying and foul language are gone in a person who is Godly. A Godly person is set apart from the worldly person.

Brotherly kindness

Godliness leads to brotherly kindness, which means kindness and affection and the showing of love of the brethren. Isn't it amazing when you meet a believer for the first time and you instantly hit it off?

Why is this? In part, it's because you and this stranger share a common love for God.

Love (agape)

And, finally, brotherly love leads to love. This love is "agape love". Agape love is not prompted by what the other person is or does, but by a love rooted in what God does.

It is the love of God which flows through us to fellow believers and also through us to non-believers.

1. Virtue
2. Knowledge
3. Self-control
4. Steadfastness
5. Godliness
6. Brotherly love
7. Love (agape)

Let these 7 qualities be ours and increase so that we may be fruitful. Fruitful means to be useful. We shouldn't be blind or short sighted.

We should never forget our purification from former sins, but instead make certain of His calling and choosing of us. For as long as we practice these 7 graces we will never stumble.

What a different man Peter is here from the Peter of the Gospels. In the Gospels, Peter resisted our Lord's discussion of His death (see Matthew 16:21-28) and was none too excited about Jesus' words concerning Peter's own death (see John 21:18-23).

Now, his death is not a dreaded possibility but an accepted certainty.

Peter views his death through the hope of the gospel and the certainty of his future inheritance (see 1 Peter 1:7). In light of the limited time Peter has left, he is all the more intent on fulfilling his calling.

Peter seeks to remind not only those living in his day, but those of us who read his epistle today of the life-transforming truths of the Word of God.

When the perspective of our death is shaped by the hope of the gospel, we will see that the one thing which matters most is our relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

And this relationship must be based on the truths of the Word of God, not on the cleverly devised claims of men.

Just as Peter viewed his life and ministry from the perspective of his eminent death, so should we. We should recognize that our time on Earth is short and that only what is done for Christ will last.

Before I was saved, my family and I lived in Utah. At that time, I had the perspective that death was something to not think about. It's unpleasant and shouldn't be discussed.

But it was difficult not to think about death because in Utah the cemeteries are right next to the main highway into town. Everyday I would have to drive right by the cemetery!

I would drive by and think to myself "How morbid!"



But now as a believer in Jesus Christ, I have the perspective that cemeteries shouldn't be hidden. Instead, cemeteries should be placed smack down in the middle of the town square.

What a great everyday reminder a cemetery is! With all the grave markers and Christian crosses in a cemetery, it grounds us with the perspective that our time is short and that only what is done for Jesus will last.

It's a vivid reminder that the American dream has nothing to do with the reality of death.

In Luke 12, Jesus tells of the parable of the rich fool. There's this guy who is rich and he has an abundance of crops. He builds bigger barns so that he can store it up.

He says "I have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry." Basically, he'll retire and enjoy himself, the American dream.

God says, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you."

Let's face it, most of us gave our lives to God in exchange for a ticket out of hell.

Once we know we are saved from hell, some of us decide to take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.

But if all you want is a little bit of Jesus to make you feel comfy, just enough to keep you from hell, you are missing out on the fullness of life you were created for.

You could very well end up on your death bed dying of old age, but still a spiritual infant.

Seeing your life as something with little meaning and seeing God as someone who was mean to you.

Or, you can end up like Jacob. Someone that eventually understood God was blessing him richly all the years of his life.

That even the hardships and sufferings were a blessing. And looking forward to dying and receiving the future blessings God has promised to last for an eternity.

The perspective you'll have on your death bed all depends on what you decide to do today, in the time you have left on earth.

Become an active disciple of Jesus Christ. Start living for the things that really matter. The things of above.

The best way to learn and implement these 7 qualities outlined in 2 Peter 1 is through a discipling relationship with a mature believer.

Jesus said this about personal discipleship:

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Matthew 11: 29 – 30

If you've never been in a discipling relationship, isn't time you begin? If you have been disciplined in the past, maybe it's time you make disciples of others.

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is how a person's perspective on life changes for the glory of God.

And the glory of God is the only perspective we all should have.

We can find a person to help you become a fruitful disciple of Jesus. Just let Pastor Paul, the elders or myself know if you're ready to go forward. Joe Carll, phone (760) 522-8520 or joecarll@cox.net