

From Regret to Blessing
Genesis 48

Can you believe that we are just two chapters away from concluding our study through the book of Genesis? For those who are interested in such statistics, tonight is the 57th night we have opened to the book of Genesis in our studies through the last several years. We began in Genesis 1 back on December 29th, 2021 over two years ago. Granted, we have made pit stops in the Psalms, Job, and 1 Peter along the way, but it has taken us two years come through this journey. I don't know about you, but I'm kind of sad to come to the end. It's been such a joy going all the way back to the beginning together, and seeing how our God does not change. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The book of Genesis reveals His unchanging character and plan for this world that He has made. Even though we are coming to the end, the journey is just beginning. I look forward to what the Lord has in store for us next as we dive into 2 Peter starting in June.

We're not there quite yet, though. Tonight, we will be confronted with the reality of the brevity of our days. We will be encouraged by the example of a man who died well. We will be exhorted to forsake this world and live for the next. We will examine how the Lord can change our perspective on this life from regret to blessing.

Regret. It's something we all struggle with. In many ways, everything that is behind us could be summed up in that one word. Our past often looms over us as a mountain of regret. The should haves, could haves, and would haves of life haunt us, and the further we go, the more years we live, the more our regrets mount. This was certainly the case for Jacob as he sojourned into Egypt to be reunited with his long-lost son. We saw last week how he summarized his life when he came to Egypt and spoke with Pharaoh.

⁹ And Jacob said to 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 the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning." (Genesis 47:9)

Those are the words of a man who has been jaded by the unsatisfied desires and devastating losses of his life. He had deceived his father for his brother's blessing and run away from his family because of the ensuing conflict with his brother. He had spent 20 years as a slave, a hired servant, in his uncle Laban's household. He had lost his beloved wife, Rachel. Perhaps worst and most painful of all, he had been deceived by his own sons about Joseph. He spent over 20 years of his life under the illusion that his chosen son was dead and gone. Imagine the pain of regret that accompanied the realization that Joseph was still alive. He's alive, that's enough, but it was still painful to think of all the wasted years. Think of all that could have been were it not for his own sons' treachery and deceit. In all of it, he could not help but blame himself, considering he started it all with his own deceitful schemes. Few and evil days. That is a man filled with regret.

The Scriptures tell us that Jacob lived another 17 years after coming to Egypt, though. What we read tonight will tell us a different story. The man we will see tonight has a different perspective

on his life. His words will no longer tell the tale of regret, but will offer the hope of future blessings. Jacob is a man ready to depart this world, and he will leave it in such a way as to leave us an incredible example of faith. Did you know that the passage we read tonight is the very passage referenced in what's been called the Hall of Faith 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)

So, what we read tonight is an incredible display of faith. Keep that in mind. Jacob has learned something during his time in Egypt. By the way, we are never too old to learn something. All of us are in the school of Jesus, being taught by the Shepherd of our souls, until the very day we die. Jacob learned many of the lessons of faith late in life, and as a result, he left his children an example of faith before departing out of this world. Let's examine it together.

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.' 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 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)."

First of all, Joseph came to his father on his death bed. This is a weighty moment. There is something deep and unsearchable about being in the presence of a person who is on his deathbed. Joseph comes to his father to say his goodbyes, and he brings his two sons with him.

The first words out of Jacob's mouth are "God Almighty," which, by the way, was the name by which God revealed Himself to Abram all the way back in Genesis 17 when He established the covenant of circumcision. It was a name passed down from generation to generation, and Jacob begins by reminding his own son of the moment that changed everything in his life—When God appeared to him all the way back in Genesis 28.

Here is the first step in going from regret to blessing. **1. Worship God and believe His promises.** The very name God Almighty, when spoken with faith and reverence, is an ascription of worship and glory. Jacob connects the name with the promises because in so doing he makes the promises sure to himself and his offspring. The promises of God are the only balm for your regrets as you come to the end of your life in this world. Jacob remembers and reminds his own son of the specific promises of blessing that God had given to him. Rather than calling the promises into question, he grounds them in the omnipotence of the Promiser. If he was

shortsighted, he could have questioned God's faithfulness. At this point, God had not fulfilled His promises. He could have bemoaned the fact that his life had been nothing but evil and misery. But instead, he chooses to worship God as the Almighty, with whom nothing is impossible, and he believes the promises of God.

This faith leads Jacob to do something remarkable. He adopts Joseph's sons as his own, giving them each an equal share in his inheritance with the rest of his sons. Note the irony here. What inheritance does Jacob actually have to offer to Manasseh and Ephraim? At this point, very little. He owns very little land, and he is a stranger in a foreign land on account of his own poverty brought about by the famine. Basically, what he owns is the burial place his grandfather, Abraham, had acquired, and possibly a small plot of land that his sons, Simeon and Levi, had taken from the Shechemites. Suffice it to say, at this moment in time, Jacob has very little to offer these boys.

Don't miss this. Joseph is being confronted here by the choice of all choices in his life. Remember who he is. He is the second-in-command in Egypt. He is a prince. He has everything that this world can offer. His father is a poor, needy, dying man—a stranger in a foreign land. He is the father of the family that sold him into slavery.

But what else do we know about Jacob? He is also Israel, the heir of the promise of God. He is the one who has the very blessing of Abraham passed down to him. He is the one who has the blessing to offer. Jacob never saw the fulfillment of God's promises. Not even close. All his days were few and evil, but he did have one possession that was more than enough. His only possession, all that he had to offer at the end of his days, was the promise and blessing of God.

This is the choice Joseph has before him: The wealth and power of Egypt or the poverty and quiet trust of waiting upon the promise of the Lord. This is the second step in going from regret to blessing. **2. Choose Jesus over this world.** Joseph chose to bring his sons, who could be the heirs of his princely power in Egypt, to receive a blessing from his father, and to become heirs themselves of the promise of God. Do not miss how Joseph's faith is operating in this sober and sacred moment in his life. He comes to his father, and in essence, he says to his sons, I am choosing God's plan for your life over my plans for your life. I am choosing to forsake all that I have, to give up your inheritance in the land of Egypt, so that you might be a partaker of the inheritance of God's promise.

What it means to be an heir of the promise is to choose the reproach of Christ over the riches of this world. The children of Abraham, according to Paul, are all those who partake of this faith in God's promises (Romans 4:11-12). Joseph had to choose for himself and his children a life of humble service to God and His Christ. Living upon the promises of God is living upon Jesus Christ, for "All the promises of God find their yes in Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 1:20)

Now, think about your own life for a moment. What are you living for? What are you living upon? Are you living upon faith in the promise of your inheritance in Jesus Christ? When you think of your future, what comes to your mind? Do you primarily think of things in this world, or

do you look beyond this world and see the glorious inheritance awaiting you in heaven? Don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying you can't think about your future in this world. It's good to plan for the future. What I'm saying is, do you ever think beyond that? Do you set your heart and affections upon something higher and greater than this world? Do you believe in the glorious inheritance that awaits you after this life is over?

If so, are you living for it today? This changes your whole perspective on your future in this world, which is why Paul prayed for the saints in Ephesus, **18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. (Ephesians 1:18)** He prayed that they would know something of this glorious inheritance because he knew something of it, and he knew how much of a difference that made upon his life. It's the difference between night and day. To live with all your focus on only this life is to live in the night, but to live with a focus on God's glorious inheritance is to live in the day, and it brings light into this present darkness. Do you want the Morning Star to rise in your heart? Choose the promises of God over the empty promises of this world. Choose the unsearchable riches of Christ over the rusty riches of this world. This is how you put on the armor of light! As Paul says in Romans 13,

12 The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (Romans 13:12)

I believe that's what Joseph was doing right here in this moment. He was choosing the promises of God over all the empty promises of this world. He was choosing blessing from his bankrupt, dying father over the wealth and prestige of Egypt, which he had in his possession. He was choosing day over night, light over darkness. Choose Jesus over this world.

Let's pick up in verse 8 to see how the blessing is given.

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 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, crossing his hands (for Manasseh 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.”**

Jacob enjoys a moment of sweet embrace with his grandchildren. Isn't that a beautiful scene. He couldn't see them, but he could pull them close and kiss them and embrace them. His heart was so affectionate toward them. Much of communication is non-verbal, and there may be more love communicated in a warm embrace than in many words. Jacob expresses his gratitude towards God for giving him this time with his grandsons.

Then, after Joseph has enjoyed a moment of worship, bowing himself face down to the earth, he puts his sons right in front of his father to be blessed by him. This act of blessing was deeply important to the family of faith. Jacob himself had been blessed by his father Isaac, when Isaac was old and his eyes were dim. This was basically the ceremony through which the blessing of the promise of God was conveyed from one generation to the next. As Isaac prepared to pass from this life to the next, he blessed his son Jacob (although, remember he thought he was blessing Esau at the time). Now, a generation later Jacob does the same to Joseph. In this moment, Jacob was functioning in the office of prophet by God's special appointment. By faith, the words he speaks in this chapter and the next are prophetic. God was speaking through Jacob, His servant. Jacob was acting under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Jacob, in blessing Joseph's sons, gives a very different summary of his life than the one he gave to Pharaoh 17 years earlier when he first came to Egypt. He now looks back on his life and sees that the same God before whom his fathers had walked had been His shepherd all his life. This is the first time in the Bible God is referred to as the shepherd of Israel. David's most famous Psalm, Psalm 23, was likely inspired by Jacob's words here. Through all the hills and valleys of life, Jacob came to understand that His God had been there with him. Jacob, whose life could have been summed up as the fruit of his own deception, was able to offer blessings at the end because he came to see that God was with Him as His Redeemer.

Don't miss the significance of the statement "the angel who has redeemed me from all evil." (v16) Theologians are divided as to who this angel is, but I think in this passage it is difficult to see this angel as anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Who is the one who redeems us from all evil? We know Him as Jesus, God Himself. Jacob put this angel on an equal level with God, for that is who He is. He and the Father are one. He is the second person of the Godhead, the only-begotten Son of God, who was with God in the beginning, and who was God in the beginning. Don't let the fact that Jacob refers to Jesus as an angel mislead you to think he is a created being like the other angels. He is God Himself, the very one who in the fulness of time would assume human nature and be born of a virgin in order to finish the work of our redemption and deliver us from death and all evil, just as He and His Father had planned from before the foundation of the world.

Jacob had a new outlook on his life here at the end. He no longer looked back with regret, but he looked forward with renewed hope for the blessings of the future. How does a dying man do that?

1. By Worshiping God and believing His promises
2. By Choosing God's promises (Jesus) over this world.
3. By surrendering to God's way rather than holding onto our own

Watch how this plays out in the closing exchange.

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. 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." (Genesis 48:17-22)

As I said, Jacob was functioning here under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit. He is being carried along by the Holy Spirit as Peter would put it (2 Peter 1:21). With that in mind, why do you think he crossed his hands to bless Ephraim in the place of the firstborn? What is the point of that? Why bless the second over the first? Why give the greater blessing to the lesser? Quite simply, Jacob is surrendering to God's way of doing things. You see, God's ways are not like our ways. God is not beholden to the customs and traditions of human beings. God has a way of choosing that which we do not esteem at all. He has a way of choosing that which we despise. The last shall be first, and the first shall be last in the Kingdom of Heaven. Perhaps the greatest exposition of this in the Scriptures is Paul's statement to the intellectually proud and sophisticated Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 1. I can't put it any better than this so I'm just going to quote the whole passage.

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18-29)

Surrender to God's way. The cross is God's way. God chooses to use that which is considered weak and ignominious, worthy of shame and reproach, to accomplish His greatest purposes in this world. He chose to use the death of His own Son to bring about our salvation. If He can use the cross to accomplish our redemption, is there anything He can't use? The only thing we can bring to our relationship with Him is our own emptiness and need. He doesn't need our strength, and He doesn't want it. He wants our weakness. He wants our humility. He wants our surrender. He wants us to come empty, so that He can fill us full.

In God's economy, the younger brother shall be greater than the older brother. Why? Simply because God gets more glory when He works through weak vessels. His power is made perfect in weakness. (2 Corinthians 12:9) His power rests upon the weak, not the strong. The prodigal returned home in weakness will get the greater blessing than the elder brother who stayed home in his own strength and for his own ends. God gets all the glory when we simply submit to His way of making us righteous. Surrendering to God's way means glorying in the cross. ¹⁴ **But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14)** This is the way of faith. Surrender to Jesus. He is your righteousness, and any other righteousness is only filthy rags in God's sight. You will only find regret if you seek to produce your own righteousness. If you seek to be great in the Kingdom of God, you will be last. If you seek to be least, you will be first. If you surrender to God's way, you will go from regret to blessing. He will bless you in Christ Jesus with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. You will be given an inheritance too great to be fathomed. You will be made an heir of salvation.

Worship God and believe His promises. Choose Jesus over this world. And surrender to God's way. Rest assured, if you take these steps, all your regrets will be washed away by the fountain of grace flowing from God's throne.

One last thought as we close. Not only did Jacob enjoy the blessings of God as he came to the end of his life, he also became a blessing to others. God used him as a channel of his blessings

even as he passed on from this life to the next. That is the highest blessing of all in this life. We are blessed to be a blessing. We get to pass on the blessings that we have received in Jesus to others. This is how our joy becomes full. It's as John said in 1 John 1:4, **4 And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:4)** What are "these things" that John was writing? It was the blessings of fellowship with the Father through Jesus Christ the Son. It was the spiritual blessings that he had received through the fulfilled promises of God in Christ. Jacob, a man whose life was filled with regrets, with should haves, and would haves, and could haves, died as a man with bright hope for the future. You can, too. If you take these three steps to step out of regret into blessing, God will give you all that you need to be a blessing to others as well, and your joy will be full. If God has turned your regrets into blessing, then share that joy with others. Let God use you to bring that same blessing into the lives of others.

If you don't have that joy, maybe tonight is the night to start receiving it. If all you know is regret, worship God and believe His promises. Choose Jesus over this world. Stop choosing things that leave you empty and joyless and full of regret. And surrender to God's way, rather than holding onto your own. Boast in the cross, and come to God in weakness and need, and He will strengthen you and satisfy you completely.