

In Every Age, In Every Generation
Genesis 47:28–48:22

You're probably familiar with these terms: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Gen Z. In the late 20th century, generations of people in the U.S. began to be called by these names as a way of noting their unique experiences and ways of thinking and behaving. According to these categories, we have as many as 5 or 6 different groups just in this room!

It can be helpful to identify some generational differences, but there seems to be a tendency to make too much of them, because for all of our differences, people in every generation are still very much the same. We face the same basic challenges and problems; we have the same basic needs and wants. A lot has changed over the course of the last 100 years, but the principles of life remain unchanged. This is no doubt true for the people of God.

For instance, in every age we are confronted with the same two choices: God's way or our own. This has continually been the case for God's people in Genesis. So many of their decisions boiled down simply to following either God or themselves, obeying His will or their own sinful will. The same is true for all people.

And in every age and every generation, we are naturally drawn to our own way.

In every generation, things like fear, or guilt, or regret stands to govern our daily choices. Or anger or shame, or selfish desire, or some kind of habit or hang up or addiction. Whenever we have choices to make, some or all of those things are right there, drawing us.

And yet God guides His people in His way by His own mercy and power.

In Philippians 1, the apostle Paul says, *"I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."* God works all things together for our good. He works through our right choices and our wrong ones. And yet we still have to make choices, both great and small, everyday.

Choosing to obey God can sometimes be difficult. Earlier in worship, we read from chapter 13 of the WCF on the doctrine of sanctification. Scripture teaches that those who trust in Jesus are in union with Him, and through this union, we are positionally holy before God. The righteousness of Jesus has been once and for all imputed to us in full, and so our position with God is as those who are completely without sin, completely perfect.

However, at the same time, while we still live in this body, sin has influence on us – it no longer has dominion over us, but it does still have influence on us. And so we are, in this life, being progressively made more like Jesus – more and more holy – over time. We are being progressively sanctified even as we are already positionally sanctified. This is the meaning, for instance, of Hebrews 10, which says, *"For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified."*

So we are completely justified before God by the righteousness of Jesus, but we are still required to make choices every day and the best way is God's way. There's a great deal of misunderstanding about how God sanctifies us progressively. You can detect this misunderstanding in a lot of preaching and worship and Christian books. The question is: How do Christians change?

And it comes down to this: it's much, much more about what Jesus has done than it is about what we need to do. The focus of progressive sanctification should be on Jesus and His work rather than on us. Both justification and sanctification are both Christ-focused. This is why, in 2 Cor. 3, Paul says, "*We all... beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*"

We behold Jesus to be saved (which is a one-time event), and we behold Him to be changed more and more each day (which is a process).

We must behold Him in order to choose God's way. And beholding His glory, seeing the fullness of who He is and all He had accomplished for us, Jesus will diminish our fear, guilt, regret, anger, shame, and selfish hang ups.

But why will beholding Jesus lead us to choose God's way? It's because as we see Jesus, the great truths of God reshape us within. Two of those stand out in these verses of Genesis. You can see them listed on pg. 7 in the WG. God's everlasting inheritance is received only by faith, and never by sight, and God's eternal election is received only by grace, and never by works.

Circumstances will change; no one knows exactly what lies ahead. But these truths are applicable for God's people in every age and every generation. They are permanent realities, true whether you recognize them or not, true whether you remember them or not. In fact, you will lose sight of them at times, and you will choose your own selfish way and not God's way, but when you see these truths again, when you see Jesus, you will realize that these things were always true, and you will grow a little more in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. You'll change, and you'll have the strength to choose God's way.

Now let's begin. Verse [28] *And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were 147 years.* Longer than he originally expected! The famine came to an end, but they remained in Egypt. They didn't go back to Canaan. The covenant family was prospering in Egypt. But Canaan was the land of promise.

Verse [29] *And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal kindly and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt."* The hand under the thigh was a way of making an oath in the ancient world. It's possibly related to the covenant sign of circumcision, swearing with God's covenant promises in mind.

“Do not bury me in Egypt,” verse [30] but let me lie with my fathers. Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place.” It sounds like Jacob is just making his final arrangements, but there’s more to it than that. *He (Joseph) answered, “I will do as you have said.”* But that’s not quite good enough for Jacob! Verse [31] *And he said, “Swear to me”; and he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed.*

Joseph was made to vow to transport Jacob’s dead body back to Canaan, which was about 200 miles away. That’s a long distance today. It was much more so back then! But this is important. Jacob makes Joseph swear on the covenant sign to return his body to the covenant land. God’s covenant of grace is front and center.

Now, look at the next verse, [1], *After this, Joseph was told, “Behold, your father is ill.”* Some more time passes, and now Jacob is taking a turn for the worse. The end is near.

So he (Joseph) took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Verse [2] And it was told to Jacob, “Your son Joseph has come to you.” Then Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed. Not easy for an elderly, dying person. But Jacob intends to do something major.

Now in these next verses, Jacob seems to be going down memory lane. Not abnormal for someone about to die; but again, there’s more to it. Verse [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.’*

Luz was where Jacob had the vision of the ladder, with the angels descending and ascending to God in heaven. God spoke to him in the vision and reiterated to Jacob these covenant promises. They were first given to Abraham, then passed to Isaac, and then to Jacob. But Jacob is dying, so he must pass them on.

Verse [5], Jacob says, *“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.”* Jacob is adopting his two grandsons. Why would he do this?

Well, unlike the rest of the covenant family, these two boys were born in Egypt. Also, their mother was an Egyptian. They were no less children of Israel, but their ties to Egypt were strong. They didn’t have the same strong personal connection to Canaan. Their dad was from there and their family was from there, but for them, Egypt was home. However, like their father Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh are covenant sons. This adoption further connects them to the promised land, and now they will have the same status as the other sons of Jacob – the same status as their uncles.

Verse [6], Jacob says to Joseph, *And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance.* In other words, the rest of

Joseph's children will be like the children of these two brothers. The rest won't be tribal heads like Manasseh and Ephraim will become.

The inheritance Jacob speaks of is the land of Canaan promised to Jacob and his descendants as an everlasting possession. Canaan is where Jacob wanted to be buried, and he's already seen to that by making Joseph swear.

Now verse [7], more memories. Jacob says, *"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)."* At Paddan, God had appeared again to Jacob in a vision, and God changed Jacob's name to Israel. After that vision, as they traveled back to Hebron, which was the family burial site, Jacob's wife (and Joseph's mother) Rachel died unexpectedly. Why does Jacob bring this up now?

It would definitely tug at Joseph's heart strings, and Manasseh and Ephraim would empathize. But it's another personal connection to Canaan. Joseph's mother and the boys' grandmother is also buried in the promised land. So you have three generations buried there.

Jacob knew that his children and grandchildren would have to choose between Egypt and Canaan. Jacob was born in Canaan. He received the family birthright in Canaan. God promised him Canaan in visions. But there was no indication that his sons would receive such visions. Jacob would not be around forever. But the covenant community must not abandon the covenant promises!

Almost 400 years after this time, the Israelites would set out from Egypt to return to Canaan. They would be led by Moses in what we call "the Exodus" on a journey to the promised land. God would reveal to them more information about the covenant. And during that time, something very important was put in writing for the Israelites. It was implied when God made the covenant with Abraham. But it was stated clearly for the Israelites, and it was this: that the promise of the land was conditional.

The everlasting possession of Canaan was contingent on one requirement. Do you know what it was? Faith. This was told plainly to the Israelites in Leviticus 18. God describes the evil of the Canaanites, and He then says to Moses and the Israelites, *"Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations...lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you."*

This, along with many other passages of OT and NT Scripture, explains that without faith, they could not enter or remain in the promised land. What we know about that generation of Israelites who left Egypt along with Moses is that most of them didn't enter the promised land because of unbelief. In other words, they did not have true faith.

Some Israelites would eventually enter and divide up the land and they would multiply in number, but eventually, the Israelites lost the promised land. They were conquered by their enemies and driven into exile according to God's will. But what about God's promise of the land? How is the everlasting inheritance received? And here's our first point today: God's everlasting inheritance is received only by faith, and never by sight.

Jacob desires for his sons – Joseph, and now Manassah and Ephraim – to understand this. And in the covenant community – which is now called the church – it is the responsibility of the older generations to teach the younger generations to recognize and embrace this.

Because each generation must have their own faith. The covenant promises must have deep meaning for each generation.

This is one reason why, in every age, the covenant sign is of such great importance. Circumcision in the old era and baptism in the new era. Covenant parents have the sign placed on their children as they claim God's covenant promises for them; and yet, the children must grow up and claim the promises for themselves. They must have faith of their own if they would receive God's everlasting inheritance.

And make no mistake – there remains an everlasting inheritance for the people of God. There is an eternal place, a true and better Canaan. But without faith, no one can go there.

What is faith? Hebrews 11 says, *"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation."* Bible scholar Michael Horton gives a good definition of faith in light of Hebrews 11 and other places in Scripture. He talks about saving faith, and it is saving faith that receives the inheritance. Horton labors to make it clear that faith is not a work. He writes, *"The faith that receives Christ is a mere act of receiving a gift."* John Calvin described faith as *"a sure and steadfast knowledge,"* a knowledge of who God is and what He has done in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Of course, Joseph and the boys lived long before Jesus, but they were told about and called to believe in the sovereign God who had shown undeserved favor toward them. He was the same God who showed grace toward Joseph's great grandfather Abraham. Scripture says, *"Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness."* He merely received, not because of anything in Him, but because of God's gift.

Brock spoke a couple weeks ago about how in this life we sojourn in this life. We live here temporarily, for what is actually a very short time. Our home is eternity with God. And we're on a journey to that place.

With all of Scripture in view, we understand that place to be the true and better Promised Land. There will be many ups and downs along the way. There will be suffering, and waiting, and we will yearn for something better, for peace and rest. We will long for that eternal place, infinitely

better than earthly Canaan. We will long for a promised land that we can never lose through our unfaithfulness. We will long for an inheritance that can't be stolen or lost. Jesus Christ has secured that place for us. It is secure with Him even now and for always. We cannot lose it! But in every age and every generation, God's everlasting inheritance is received only by faith, and never by sight.

With the security that we are fully justified and sanctified in Christ, and that we are continually being sanctified in this life by Him, we must walk by faith in all matters of our lives, both great and small. This is the command to God's people for the choice that we make.

Where is God calling you to keep His covenant, walk by faith and choose His way? Where is He calling you to forsake your own way and obey His Word to you?

Now look at verse [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."* Jacob's eyesight is all but gone. This is similar to when Jacob was blessed by his father Isaac. Jacob tricked his father by pretending to be his older brother Esau. Isaac intended to bless Esau, but when it was done, he acknowledged that it was God's will for Jacob to receive the blessing and rights of the firstborn.

Verse [11] *And Israel said to Joseph, 'I never expected to see your face; and behold, God has let me see your offspring also.'* Jacob had believed Joseph to be dead. And here he is, not only alive but with sons!

As part of the ancient adoption ritual, the boys had sat on the knees of Jacob. Verse [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.* It's time for the blessing, and knowing that his father can't really see, Joseph aims to help Jacob by positioning each of the boys at Jacob's right and left hands, with Manasseh, who is the oldest, at Jacob's right hand, to receive the blessing of the firstborn.

But notice verse [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)."* This is backwards from what Joseph expects and from what was common practice in the ancient world. Jacob is choosing the younger over the older for no apparent reason.

Verse [15], *And he (Jacob) 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.” What a wonderful benediction! What a blessing!

I couldn't help but think of the opportunity that we give to fathers to read a blessing over their children at their baptism. Jacob desires for them to be blessed with the same faith with which God has blessed him. He desires for God to show them the same grace. He desires for God to shepherd them as God shepherded him. But Jacob understands that it is a work of the sovereign God alone.

Parents and grandparents will not always be there to urge their children or grandchildren toward faith in Christ. We must entrust them to God in prayer and appeal to God's mercy.

You may have noticed in verse 16 that Jacob mentions *“the angel who has redeemed me.”* This refers to Jacob's wrestling match with God – a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. Christ is the Redeemer. We entrust ourselves to Him, and we entrust our descendents to Him. We pray, *“Oh God, give my little ones the gift of faith! Please redeem them from all evil!”* And we should continue to pray those prayers until we die!

Look now at verse [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.”*

Perhaps Joseph thinks, *“Oh my dear old dad – he's losing it.”* But look at verse [19], *But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know.”* Jacob knows what he's doing; but also, he understands why Joseph doesn't understand. It's because this is not being done in the way the world does things.

Jacob goes on, verse 19, and talks about Manassah, the older. He says, *“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.”* This is yet another OT picture of biblical, God-centered election. God chooses. It would be terribly wrong to presume that Jacob chose Ephraim because of something in Ephraim, because of something he saw in him or some ability Ephraim possessed.

And this brings into focus our second point today: God's eternal election is received only by grace, and never by works. In Titus 3, the apostle Paul writes, *“He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.”*

After the final two Genesis sermons over the next two weeks, we will begin Romans 9-11, which is a good bridge between Genesis and Revelation. In that part of Romans, Paul explores God's choosing in salvation and His election by grace. Paul explains how not all those who were

descended from Jacob were truly Israel. Not all of them knew God. But in every age, there were always some who did.

God's choosing by grace is naturally puzzling to us. Dr. R.C. Sproul makes a helpful comment. He says, *"We must make a distinction between God's doing something for no reason and His doing something for no reason found in us."* In other words, God does not arbitrarily choose. He chooses according to His good pleasure. Here in Genesis 48, Jacob, who is the head of the covenant community at that time, foreshadows Jesus Christ as he bestows favor not as the world does, but as God does. And it's all grace.

Even what you achieve as a result of your good decisions or abilities – all of it is God's graciousness toward you. The degree to which we depend on God is stunning. And when it comes to salvation, the idea that God's election would be based on Him looking into the future and seeing something good in us that would cause Him to choose us is patently absurd. It's ridiculous. The Scriptures of the OT and NT totally debunk that idea. God's eternal election is received only by grace, and never by works, and there's two more verses here that further emphasize this.

Look at verse [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."*

There's a lot going on in these verses. You have Joseph in view, receiving this, but also we must remember that the Israelites under Moses were being reminded as they heard these words that God would be with them and bring them to the promised land – by faith, of course. And even for the church today, this is a reminder of God's promise to never leave or forsake us and to keep us until the end.

But immediately you have Jacob giving Joseph this specific piece of land in Canaan. The ESV translation says "one mountain slope," but many scholars recognize this as a reference to the area known as Shechem. The word here in the Hebrew is "shechem." At Shechem, some of Jacob's sons killed many people in vengeance and then fled. Joseph would later be buried at Shechem. And hundreds of years later, when Canaan was divided among the tribes of Israel, if you look where Manassah and Ephraim's land meets, right there near the border is Shechem.

The point here is that Jacob allots this to Joseph according to His good pleasure. He can give it to whomever he chooses. Is it wrong for Jacob to do this? No – it's his to give.

It brings to mind Paul's words in Romans 9, which we will look at closer very soon. Maybe this is a commercial for that sermon series! Paul discusses how many of the Israelites were not part of the true Israel because they did not have saving faith. Paul writes, *"When Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, [11] though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not*

because of works but because of him who calls—[12] she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” [13] As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” [14] What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! [15] For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” [16] So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.”

If somewhere you and I are tempted to find fault with God in His election, Paul then says, “*Who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” [21] Has the potter no right over the clay?”*

It should be a humbling thing to look at God’s amazing grace. Where would you be without the kindness of God, without God’s good pleasure toward you?

I can’t speak for you, but I can speak for me. I wouldn’t be your pastor without God’s grace. I wouldn’t be standing in this pulpit. I wouldn’t have understanding of and faith in God’s Word. And without God’s free grace, I wouldn’t be able to behold the glory of Jesus Christ. What about you? Where would you be apart from God’s free grace?

As we make our daily choices, both great and small, a clear view of Jesus Christ will lead us in choosing God’s way. The person and work of Jesus transforms every decision. What Jesus has done for us gives meaning and purpose to everything in our lives. Who Jesus is to us gives us hope in every circumstance. The love and power of Jesus addresses the fear, guilt, shame, regret, anger, and selfish desire.

Will you lay your whole life before Jesus and trust Him with everything? Will you trust His ways and His plans and His purpose in all things? Will you trust His goodness and His wisdom and His timing. Will you trust what He is doing in your life today?

Behold the glory of the Lord Jesus, and God will you grace to trust Him more. Times will change, but God remains the same. And His people can and must walk with Him in every age and in every generation.

Let’s bow together in prayer.