

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

08.18.2024 | Covenant Promises and Crossed Hands | Genesis 48:8-22; 49:8-12 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to Genesis chapter 48. We're continuing in our study in the story of Joseph. And if you were here last week, you might know that I mentioned that what we covered last week is really the kind of the climax of Joseph's story. I mean, after all the waiting, after all the setbacks and the trials, Joseph finally finds himself in this really high position that God has given him, a position where he is able to provide for many people to keep them alive, where he's able to provide food for not just the people of Egypt, but over the whole earth and even his family, but not just a position to provide for them with physical nourishment, but even a place to pardon his brothers who had sinned against him.

So last week, we saw what's really that the story has been building up to, and you might be wondering, well, if we've already reached the climax of the story, what are we still doing studying the life of Joseph? And it's actually interesting that I think what comes after this kind of climactic part of the story is actually very important. And because it comes after that really crucial moment in the story, I think many times parts that we overlook, but what happens in somewhat of the conclusion of Joseph's story, as we'll look at this week and next week, is we find that there are some really important words that are said, some really important actions that are taken that we can really learn from. So just to kind of catch you up where we're picking up today, Jacob has moved the whole family down to Egypt. Joseph has warned them there's going to be more years of famine. I can't just keep sending grain to you, move the family down to Egypt where you will be provided for. So Jacob and the family moved down to Egypt. Joseph provides for them along with many others. They find themselves now at home in Egypt, and Jacob is coming to the end of his life. In fact, as we read this portion of the story, you can see that his body is getting older and is starting to fail him.

You have to kind of remember, these aren't just characters in a story, these are real people. Maybe at some point in your life, you've been around a parent or a grandparent who's coming to the end of their time on earth. Maybe in some way, you can relate to this portion of the story. And as Jacob takes his last breath and speaks some of his last words, he really says some things that are very profound. He does some things that are very important, and I think what the Bible tells us are a step of worship and an act of faith, and they're also very instructive to us about our relationship with God, about how we can walk in relationship with him. So I want us to pick up in Genesis chapter 48, we won't read the whole chapter, we'll start in verse eight and read to the end of the chapter, and then we're just going to read a portion of Genesis 49.

So in Genesis 48, starting in verse eight, it says, "When Israel," it's also Jacob, "saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?" "Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons whom God has given me here." "And he said, "Bring them to me, please, "and I may bless them." "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. "And Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face. "And behold, God has let me see your offspring also." "Then Joseph removed them from his knees, "and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. "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, "brought them near him. "And Israel stretched out his right hand "and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger. "And his left hand was on the head of Manasseh, "crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the firstborn. "And he blessed Joseph and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, "the God who had been my shepherd "all my life long to this day, "the angel who has redeemed me from all evil. "Bless the boys. "And in them let my name be carried on, "the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac. "Let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." "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. "And Joseph said to his father, "Not this way, my father, "since 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 also shall become a people. "And he also shall be great. "Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he. "His offspring shall become a multitude of nations." "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. "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. "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."

Now in chapter 49, God speaks, excuse me, Jacob speaks blessings over his sons. And I particularly just wanna read the portion that he speaks over Judah, which we find in Genesis 49, verses eight through 12. Jacob says, "Judah, your brothers shall praise you. "Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies. "Your father's son shall bow down before you. "Judah is a lion's cub. "From the prey, my son, you have gone up. "He stooped down. "He crouches a lion and as a lioness, "who dares rouse him? "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, "nor the ruler's staff from between his feet "until tribute comes to him. "And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. "Binding his fold to the vine "and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, "he has washed his garments in wine "and his vesture in the blood of grapes. "His eyes are darker than wine "and his teeth whiter than milk."

That's kind of interesting. We have these words from a grandfather to his grandsons and a father to his sons. And it could just seem like a nice thing that a grandfather or a father is saying while on his deathbed. But it's pretty interesting is that when you look at the New Testament, if you were to go to the book of Hebrews, in the book of Hebrews, there is a chapter that's often referred to as the Hall of Faith. It's chapter 11 and it is a chapter that speaks about the importance of faith and it also speaks about examples of faith in the Old Testament. And in Hebrews 11, there is just one verse really dedicated to Jacob's faith and the faith that he displayed. And listen to the verse that the author of Hebrews highlights. In verse 21, the way that he highlights Jacob's faith, he says, "By faith, Jacob, when dying, "blessed each of the sons of Joseph, "bowing in worship over the head of his staff." It's kind of interesting. He doesn't say by faith, Jacob wrestled with God or Jacob had a dream where there was a ladder going up to heaven, but he chooses to point this out, that by faith, Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph. Now what is happening here is not just a grandfather or a father saying some nice things and some well wishes of blessing over his kids and grandkids, but what is happening here is actually an act of faith. Author of Hebrews says it's an act of worship what Jacob is doing here. And specifically, I want to point out that I think Jacob is speaking in faith and he is acting in worship because he is reiterating the promises of God and he is displaying the grace of God. What I think we see in this passage is that Jacob is reiterating the promises of God and displaying the grace of God and those are the ways that this passage, I think most intersects with our lives and our relationship with God. And so I want us to think about these kind of two themes as we consider this portion of the story.

So first, I want to draw your attention to the promises that Jacob pronounces and I want to let you know that God's promises sustain us. One of the main ways that I think we can learn from this story and apply it to our lives is to remember the fact that God's promises have been given to us and they are given to us to sustain us through every season of life. So a lot of words are spoken in this passage. We read some of them, but not all of them. And in those words, there are a lot of promises. And what's really interesting is that if you were to go and to look at the promises that Jacob makes or these blessings that he pronounces, while some new details emerge at times in what Jacob is saying, much of what he is saying is reiterating promises that God had already spoken. What he was doing is he was actually speaking or proclaiming these covenantal promises of God that God had entered into with Abraham and with his people and he is now saying these promises are still true and applied to us today. So notice what he says in verse 16. As he, in this time of speaking about all that God has done for him, he says, "Bless the boys, "and in them let my name be carried on, "the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, "and let them grow into a multitude "in the midst of the earth."

So he's saying here, let Joseph's sons grow into a large family. Let them multiply and be all throughout the earth. And what he's saying there is not just a wishing about his family would grow. You know, some families I think are really focused on the name being carried on. Have you ever been around a family like that? My dad is the youngest of 11. So he's got a lot of brothers and sisters. There was six boys and five girls in his family. And out of those 11 kids, there came about 35 or so grandkids, we lost count after 30. But there was a lot of grandkids. But out of all those grandkids, only four were sons of sons. You see what I'm saying? Only four of the grandkids were sons of sons, meaning they were the only four who really had the chance to carry on that day name. So sometimes we'd be at these family gatherings and older relatives would come up to me and in somewhat joking, but probably mostly serious ways, they'd say, "You need to have boys, this is your responsibility to help carry on the day name." Well, I think I've done my part. I have three sons. So the pressure's off me. But this is much different than that. This isn't just a family that wants to carry on the family name. When Jacob speaks about the fact that his name is gonna be carried on, the name of Abraham and Isaac, and this family is gonna grow into a multitude, he is referencing a promise that God had made to Abraham. Because Abraham was very old and he didn't have 11 kids, he didn't have any kids. God told him, "I'm going to give you not just a child, but I'm going to give you a family. And one day that family is going to grow into a great multitude that's more than the stars in the sky." And what Jacob is saying is that promise still stands. God is going to continue to bless you. He's going to bless

these boys that this name might continue, that God's covenantal promise that he made with Abraham and with our people will be kept. But it's not just about the size of the family, how big they would be, but also where they would live. Notice what he says to Joseph and the boys later in verse 21. Towards the end of the passage, he says, "And 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." In other words, Jacob is saying, "I know we're in Egypt right now. I know God has brought us here to preserve us, to continue on that family line, even through a time of famine. But know that while you're in Egypt, God will be with you, but also there will come a day when you will once again live in the land of your fathers."

This is what we often refer to as the promised land. And it is the promised land because God had promised it to the fathers. It was part of that covenantal promise that God had said, "My people will actually go and they will live in a foreign land for 400 years, but I will bring them back to this promised land." And I think it's really important that Jacob reiterates this promise in these moments, because that 400 years is just about to start. If you were just to turn a couple of pages in your Bible to Exodus chapter one, you would find that the book of Exodus begins by saying that there arose a king in Egypt who did not know Joseph. He said, "What are all these Hebrews doing here? What are all these Israelites doing here?" And he starts to oppress them. They start to be put in bondage and in slavery for 400 years. It's a long time to have to wait on God's promises to come true, 400 years.

I mean, we've talked throughout Joseph's story that there's going to be seasons of waiting. Sometimes Joseph had to wait two years after he had interpreted the dreams to get out of prison. Maybe he had to wait about 13 years from when his dream was first given to him to when it actually came to fruition. But what about when it takes more than a few years? What about when God's promises take more than 13 years to come true? What if God's promises don't come true in your lifetime? What if you have to wait 400 years for God to fulfill what he said he was going to do? What sustains us through those seasons? So many times I've heard people come and talk to me about, man, I just, I keep waiting for God to answer in so many ways God does answer when we're seeking him. So many times God doesn't always answer in the way that we would want. His promises aren't always fulfilled in the way that we would hope in our timing or maybe even in our lifetime. What will sustain us?

It is the fact that God is working all things together for good. It is the fact that God is over all. He is sovereign and he is good and he loves each one of us and that his promises will come to pass. In fact, in the book of Hebrews, I referenced Hebrews 11 earlier, in Hebrews chapter six, there is this reference to the covenantal promises that God made to Abraham. And it speaks about these promises in such a profound way that I just want to read it to you and I hope that it would be applicable to our lives. In Hebrews chapter six, starting in verse 13, it said, "For when God made a promise to Abraham, "since he had no one greater by whom to swear, "he swore by himself, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you. "And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, "obtained the promise. "For people swear by something greater than themselves "and all their disputes and oath is final for confirmation. "So when God desired to show more convincingly "to the heirs of the promise, "the unchangeable character of his purpose, "he guaranteed it with an oath. "So that by two unchangeable things "in which it is impossible for God to lie, "we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement "to hold fast to the hope set before us." This is where I want us to hear it, that we're not just looking back at promises given to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, but the author of Hebrews says, "We today, we have a hope that is set before us, "a strong encouragement because of the promises of God." And notice what he goes on to say, verse 19, "We have this as a sure and steadfast "anchor of the soul, a hope that enters "into the inner place behind the curtain, "where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, "having become a high priest forever "after the order of Melchizedek."

Do you notice what he says there, that these covenantal promises of God are like an anchor for our soul? Does your soul have an anchor? We're going to go through different seasons of life, we're going to go through different storms of life. So many times in the storms of life, the waves and the wind would beat against you and push you to a place where you never thought you would be. In those moments, it is so important to have an anchor for your soul. And the author of Hebrews is saying that the promises of God, that he both made by himself, but also entered into a covenant, an oath with Abraham, are given for us still today, that we might have a strong encouragement, that we might have a hope in every season of life. I don't know, you might be going through a storm right now. Maybe you feel like you're just coming out of one or just heading into one. I find that it's not always so easy to just gauge life as by its ups and downs. So many seasons of life are filled with both ups and downs. So many seasons of life are filled with storm and calm. The question in

all of those seasons is do you have an anchor for your soul? The Bible is saying God's promises, which Jacob is reiterating here. The Bible reiterates time and time again are a steadfast anchor for our soul. And they can be trusted because it says Jesus has entered into the inner place. Jesus, our great high priest, our mediator, has gone before us. And this is actually why I wanted us to read that portion of Genesis chapter 49.

Because as God, excuse me, as Jacob speaks to Judah, he also reminds that there's not just a promise that the family would increase and that they would be in the Promised Land, but that there's always been promise, one who would come from this family, one who would be a king and a ruler. And you'll notice when he says to Judah, he says many different things that people kind of debate on how to interpret. The things about the foal and the donkey, some people say that refers to Jesus and his writing into Jerusalem and other things, people say it refers to other parts of prophecy that have been fulfilled. But just notice exactly what he says to Judah about him being the line of a ruler or a king. He says in verse nine, "Judah is a lion's cub. "From the prey, my son, you have gone up." He stooped down, he crouches a lion and has a lioness. Who dares rouse him? He's comparing Judah to a lion because that is the kingly animal, that is the ruler of the animal kingdom, if you will. And then he clarifies it by saying, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah "nor the ruler staff from between his feet "until tribute comes to him "and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples."

You notice what he's saying there is that from Judah is going to come one who is a king, who is going to reign. And this king is going to have a kingdom that will last forever. You notice that the scepter, which is the sign of the authority and the rule, he says it never departs from him. So yes, one day Jacob would come, I mean, excuse me, one day David would come from the line of Judah and he would become king. And his sons and grandsons in the line after him would continue to reign as king in Israel. But this prophecy, this promise, is about something even greater. It's about a kingdom that never ends. It's about a kingdom that was over more than just the people of Israel. Notice how he says, "Over this kingdom shall be "the obedience of the peoples," or the nations. What he is promising here is that one is going to come who is going to be an eternal king over all the people. The Bible says this promise has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Lion of Judah. He is the king who reigns forever. He came just as it was promised. He is currently reigning just as it was promised. And he will one day come again just as he promised. So his promises, the promises of God, can be a source of sustenance for us. They can be an anchor for our soul in every season of life, rooted in what God has said and rooted in what he has done, particularly in sending Jesus. It can be a place of refuge and a place of rest.

And one of the reasons I think God's promises can be a place of rest for us is because we are reminded that he doesn't keep his promises based on our conduct or how well we hold up our end of the bargain. God keeps his promises by his word and by his grace. And actually, God's grace is on display in this passage. And I want to point out to you this kind of second theme that I'd want us to consider, and that is God's grace surprises us. God's grace surprises us. So in this portion of the story, I think we have God's grace being displayed in a very kind of understated way that it could be easy for us to miss. And so many times, I think grace is surprising to us, easy for us to miss. I mean, I think so many times we might say we believe that we are saved only by grace, but I think sometimes we think that we maybe keep our relationship with God by our efforts or by our own good works. Yeah, we might be saved initially by grace, but then we've got to do our part and stay in this relationship with God. But the Bible actually says is from beginning to end, our salvation, our relationship with God is all of grace. And I think Jacob is beginning to understand that in this passage. You know, I mentioned last week that I think in that portion of the story, you see Jacob still struggling with the brokenness of sin. He's still feeling the effects of the sin of his sons, which was birthed by his own sin and his favoritism towards Joseph. But did you notice in this passage when Jacob says, "I never thought I would see you again, Joseph, but now God has been gracious to me to not just see you, but your offspring also."

Seems that I think Jacob is being reminded of the grace of God. And he's reflecting on it even as he blesses the boys. Would you notice what he says in chapter 48, starting in verse 15? 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, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil." He refers here to God as his shepherd. That's a pretty common thought for us because we have places like Psalm 23, where we say the Lord is my shepherd. But did you know this is actually the first place in the Bible where God is referred to as a shepherd? Jacob is coming to this realization that he is a lot like a sheep. That's not a very flattering picture, but it is very accurate. Like a sheep, he tends to stray. Like a sheep, he needs guidance and he recognizes all the days of my life. Through the ups and downs or the trials and tribulations, God has been my shepherd.

Not only that, God, when he says the angel, I don't think he's just meaning an angel, but I think he means the work of the Lord. He has redeemed me from evil. He recognizes that were it not for the grace of God, he would be far from God. He would be probably dead, disowned by his family. But all the evil he had committed and had been done against him, he recognizes that it is God by his grace who has redeemed him from evil. Seems that in this later years, Jacob is really understanding God's grace and speaking about it.

I don't know about you, but I just love to be around people who seem to have really had a true experience of God's grace. I mean, sometimes you'll find people who talk about God's grace, but they still seem to think that God loves them because of something that they've done. They were maybe a little bit more deserving of God's love and God's grace than others. Those type of people, they tend to, I feel like, be very critical of others and look down upon people. But when you meet somebody who really has experienced God's grace towards them, who knows that they would have been far from God, they would have been ensnared by the evil one or evil plans, were it not by God's grace, those people tend to be the most gracious people. I think Jacob is kind of displaying that as he is reflecting on God's grace to him, but he's also displaying God's grace in his actions. And particularly, he's displaying God's grace as he blesses these two boys, Ephraim and Manasseh.

So you got to get a little bit of the picture in your mind. I know it's described with the left hand and the right hand and what's going on here, but just kind of understand the context a little bit. In this culture, the oldest son, the firstborn son, was the position of privilege. So the older son, the firstborn son, got the double portion of the inheritance. The firstborn son, he was the one who the family line was really considered to go through. And so he was often given the right hand of honor. And so as Joseph approaches Jacob, he knows that Jacob can't see real well, his eyes were dim. In fact, Jacob even says, "Who are these boys?" He says, "These are my sons." And so Joseph really tries to help Jacob out. It says that he brings his younger son in his right hand, but to Jacob's left hand. And he brings his older son in his left hand to Jacob's right hand, hoping that it'd be very easy for Jacob to just put his hands out and to bless the boys appropriately.

But what happens? Jacob crosses his hands. He puts the right hand of favor on the younger son and the left hand on the older son. And this surprises Joseph. In fact, it bothers him a little bit. Notice what it says in verse 17. "When Joseph saw that his father had laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him. He took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. Joseph said to his father, "Not this way, my father, since 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 also shall become a people. He also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall serve, excuse me, shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations." In other words, Joseph sees this and it displeases him. In fact, that word for displeases, probably that's a soft translation. Really, Joseph thought this was like an evil thing being done. This wasn't right.

But Jacob says it's not an accident. As the author of Hebrews says, this was actually an act of faith or an act of worship. Now, I think it's kind of interesting. Why would Joseph be so bothered by this? I mean, it's not like Joseph is the firstborn's son. It's not like he sees that the firstborn should be given a kind of privilege because he received it in some way. I mean, he knows that Jacob isn't the firstborn's son. His dad wasn't supposed to be the one who got the inheritance of the birthright, but he kind of stole it from his father when his eyes were dim. Why does it bother him so much? I have to think it's probably because Joseph is a little bit like each one of us. Joseph probably thinks he knows how things are supposed to be done. He knows the people that are supposed to be privileged and the people who the line is supposed to go through. He knows how things should be carried out. But in this act of grace, it surprises him. It displeases him.

In fact, I think the Bible points out to us time and time again that so often, grace is both surprising and displeasing to us. You think about some of the parables Jesus tells. He tells a story of people who were hired to work for a day and those who were hired to work for all 12 hours were paid a day's wage. It's what they were owed. It makes sense. But the people who were hired last and only worked one hour were paid the same amount. And those people who had to work all day and made them mad, they were displeased. Why? They didn't like the grace that was being shown to the people who only worked an hour. It's not because they were being shortchanged of what they were owed, but they did not like the grace. It's a similar story in this parable of the prodigal son. A son gets his inheritance and goes out and squanders it and lives however he wants. And when he comes home, it's like he's welcomed as a hero. A party is thrown for him.

They kill the fatted calf and it upsets the older brother. Why? Because he doesn't like the grace that is being shown to the younger brother. See, grace goes against all of our natural instincts.

I think each one of us in many ways are kind of born with a heart, with a legalistic bent. We kind of believe that God really should bless those who do good things. God should show his favor to those who live in a way that is good and right. And God should punish or disprove of those people who don't live the right way. I mean, people say to me sometimes, how could you believe in a God who would take a person who's over a different religion, but does so many good things in this world and cares for people and reflects a lot of what God wants people to do, but because he doesn't believe in Jesus, he's separated from God for all of eternity. But then there's this other person who does all these terrible things, but because they pray a prayer or they believe in Jesus, they get to go be with God forever, how is that fair? And I think when we ask questions like that, it might show that we actually don't understand some things about theology and salvation, but I think mostly it means that we don't understand grace, that we actually are surprised by grace so often, because it goes against our natural instincts, even for Joseph here, who has so received God's grace, he misses a display of God's grace, but it seems to be that Jacob, not only being led by God to pronounce this blessing in this way of promising certain things, but to display this grace in a certain way, and as he crosses his hands and he puts the younger over the older, he is showing that God doesn't work according to our plan,

God doesn't value according to our values. I mean, I think this is the why time and time again in the Bible, God does things that seem backwards to us. It's why the younger brother's often the one to lead the older brother. It is why it's that little brother David, who is chosen to be anointed to be the next king. So often, God is working in ways that seem contrary to what we would think. In fact, the Bible says God purposefully does that. He uses the weak things of the world to shame the wise. He uses the weak things of the world to show his power. He uses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. He does it by grace so that he might get the glory. And I love this picture of grace, and I love the way that it can hopefully teach us, because I think the example Jacob is giving us is that when you really understand that you've received God's grace, it causes you to be a gracious person. And I think that's true for each one of us, that when we really fix our eyes on him, when we really do believe that we are who we are, we have our relationship with him only by his grace, it will turn us into gracious people.

But how do we actually do that? I mean, how do we regularly remind ourselves of the grace of God towards us? Well, one thing that I might just give you this morning is that perhaps even just as you go from here, you would just be reminded of those crossed hands. Maybe you would just have that picture in your mind of crossed hands, because the reality is at the cross of Jesus Christ, God crossed his hands. Let me think about it. At the cross, there is Jesus who is the perfect person, the sinless person, the really truly obedient son. If anyone deserves the right hand of honor, it would be him. And then there are all of those of us who are shameful sinners, rebels, who really deserve the hand of judgment. But what we find is at the cross, God crossed his hands. That upon Jesus was laid the shame of our sin, the judgment that our sin was due. And at the cross, what was placed on us was the honor and the righteousness of Jesus Christ. This is what is available to you because of God's grace. This is the only hope that we have in God's grace. And when we would see ourselves in this position, only where we are because God crossed his hands, I think it would turn us into more gracious people.

And when we would be shaped by God and his promises, we would have a firm foundation, as we sing of. We would have an anchor for our soul that steadies us in every season, that keeps us where God wants us. But we would also find a place of refuge and rest because we would know God's promises aren't kept because of how good we act or how much we do. But it's all because of his grace. That from our relationship with him and all the promises that he keeps are all because he has chosen to be gracious to us. He's not saved us because we were worth saving in terms of our own merit, our own goodness. He's not saved us because we were more lovable than anyone else, but he has saved us merely by his grace. If we would be shaped by that, I think we would be more gracious people. So let us have a firm foundation, an anchor for our soul and the promises of God. And let us be shaped by, as we fix our eyes on Jesus and the cross, a gracious God, which allows us to show that grace to those who are around us.