

God Blesses His People

Genesis 48:1-49:28

[Preaching plan]

Intro: What Does it Mean to Be Blessed?

The term *blessed* has historically been used in religious contexts. *I'm blessed* means *I'm grateful to God for things I don't deserve*, specially, the spiritual blessings of salvation.

But in the late 2000s to early 2010s, the word *blessed* took on a generic expression of gratitude. That's when *#blessed* was created. It was all over social media.

- “Hanging with my family tonight. Life is good.” *#blessed*
- “Got an anonymous gift of \$200 in mail when I was short on my bills!” *#blessed*

Then in the early to mid 2010s, *#blessed* was used to describe personal achievements.

- “I was voted employee of the month for the 4th month in a row.” *#blessed*
- “All that hard work paid off.” [Picture of their legs sunbathing on their yacht with the ocean in the background.] *#blessed*

But in the mid 2010s to just recently, *#blessed* took on a negative sarcastic tone.

- “I spilled coffee all over my white shirt at work.” *#blessed*
- “I dropped my phone in the toilet...again.” *#blessed*

It’s amazing how a term used to describe God’s lavishing grace upon his people can be used in such trite and self-focused ways.

Blessing is a huge theme in Genesis. It’s found in the beginning when God created man in his image, he *blessed* them. But when sinned against God, he forsook that blessing of intimate fellowship, so God called Abraham and said, “I will *bless* you, and through your offspring, I will *bless* all peoples.”

We’ve watched this theme unfold in Genesis and now as we come to the end of the book, it’s no surprise that Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, on his deathbed, *blesses* his sons. The blessings he bestows upon them are blessings from God himself. Consider 3 characteristics of God’s blessing...

Characteristic #1: God's Blessing is His Faithfulness Displayed [48:1] Make not of the order of their names. Manasseh is mentioned first because he's older, which means, culturally, he should get the greater blessing. (He's probably in his early 20s by this point, while Ephraim is in his late teens.)

[v2] He's 147 years old, weak, frail, and sick. The fact that he sits up shows how important what he's about to do is. **[v3]** He's referring to ch28 when he saw angels ascending and descending on a stairway to heaven, and God was standing over him. **[v4]**

This is the same promise God gave Abraham: a promise of a people through whom all peoples will be blessed AND a promise of an eternal possession of a land, not a temporary possession, like their current situation.

So the blessing Jacob is about to give is a blessing God has already given him and his fathers before him. **[v5]** He's adopting his grandsons as his own sons, so they get the blessing, just like Reuben and Simeon.

“I’m treating Ephraim and Manasseh like I would my first two sons.” Notice the ordering of their names. He mentions Ephraim first. **[v6]** He’s saying Ephraim and Manasseh will be heads of the people of Israel (that’s the name he’s talking about) because they will represent two tribes of Israel. Which is exactly what takes place in later history.

And then Jacob makes this curious statement about his dead wife, Rachel. **[v7]** I think he’s saying, “Ephraim and Manasseh are gonna inherit the land that my favored wife—their grandmother—was buried in. That’s why she’s not here in Egypt. But you and your offspring will go to her!”

Jacob is passing along the blessing he received from the Lord that his father Isaac passed to him and his father Abraham passed to him, putting on display the faithfulness of God from generation to generation.

Note that: God’s promises do not fall through the cracks. He remains faithful to each generation. That’s the first characteristic.

Characteristic #2: God's Blessing is Grace Unexpected. [vv8-9] Jacob knows who his grandsons are. He's been in Egypt with them for 17yrs. He saw them grow up.

Asking for their identity was a cultural way of formalizing adoption. *Like at a wedding when the officiant asks, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?" The pastor usually knows who the father of the bride is. It's just a formal way of handing her over in marriage.*

[v10] What does this remind you of?

Remember when Jacob deceived his blind dad Isaac into blessing him instead of his older brother Esau. Isaac couldn't see, so he "accidentally" blessed his younger son.

Will the same thing happen here? Will blind Jacob accidentally bless the younger son like his dad did with him? **[vv11-12]** So Jacob is sitting up in his bed, and his grandsons are placed on his knees (probably their heads bowed on his knees; they were too old and Jacob was too frail for them to sit in his lap).

Then Joseph pulls them back, and he bows himself before his dad. And notice what Joseph does next. **[v13]** See what he's doing? He is intentionally putting Manasseh, the older son, near Jacob's right hand (a symbol of strength), so that Manasseh could receive the greater blessing because that was the cultural norm. But what does Jacob do? **[v14]**

Did he make a mistake? Is he too blind to see what he's doing? No, this seems intentional. **[vv15-16a]** Notice he describes God in three ways: 1) "The God before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, walked." He's the same God who made the same promises to prior generations. 2) "The God whose been my shepherd all my life." He's not just my father's God; he's mine. 3) "He's the angel who had redeemed me from evil." God showed up in the form of an angel on several occasions in Genesis, including the time when Jacob wrestled one and was blessed by him.

It's THIS God to whom Jacob says, "Bless these boys." **[16b-c]** It's a promise of a people and a land.

When the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh later become tribes in the land of Canaan, they increase in size from 72,000 to 85,000 in just a few years after the Exodus. Whereas the tribes of Rueben and Simeon decrease from 105,000 to 65,000.

Gey this: these blessings are not wishful thinking. Like, “May this happen. I don’t know if it will. But God bless you.” This is prophetic. Jacob is declaring what WILL happen. And that’s why Joseph responds the way he does. He thinks his dad made a mistake! **[vv17-18]**

He thinks his dad messed up because he’s old and blind. But he’s thinking only in worldly cultural norms. Whereas Jacob has in mind the pattern of God’s kingdom. What pattern?

[vv19-20] Jacob is following the pattern he’s seen again and again. God shows unexpected grace. He showed it to Isaac over Ishamel. He showed it to Jacob over Esau. And he shows it to Ephraim over Manasseh.

The second year after the Exodus, a census was taken in Israel showing Ephraim was 20% larger than Manasseh. The younger received a greater blessing.

God's grace is not restricted to cultural norms. His grace is not given to those whom we'd expect. That's not grace. Grace is unearned, undeserved, unexpected. If you expect it, you don't understand it.

Oh that you would understand grace! Do you? Do you know what it means to be graciously, undeservingly blessed by God? That's what it means to be a Christian. You know what you deserve for your sin is hell, but God gives you grace in the person of his Son. **[GOSPEL]**

Jacob understands grace because Jacob received grace, so he closes by showing grace. **[vv21-22]** We don't really know what he's talking about in v22. A lot happened in Jacob's life that wasn't recorded in Genesis. But we do know he's showing favor to Joseph.

He believes God will bring Joseph to the promised land one day, as he says in v21, which is fascinating because Joseph will die in Egypt. But before he dies, he asks that his bones be carried to the promised land. That's fulfilled 450 years later in Joshua 24.

Because God's blessing on his people is his faithfulness displayed, AND it's his grace unexpected. Lastly...

Characteristic #3: God's Blessing is Appropriately Fitted. In chapter 49, Jacob turns towards the rest of his sons to bless them. [vv1-2] So what he's gonna say is very important. Each son will get a unique "blessing." Why? We get a clue from [v28].

The blessings Jacob gives in ch49 are *suitable* to each of the sons. They're appropriate. They fit. Some of the sons receive amazing blessing. Others, not so much... because some of them sinned big time, and sin has future consequences.

However, every one of the sons' descendants inherit the promised land. Though the sin's consequences are felt into the future, all of God's people make it home! Why? I wanna argue it's ultimately because of the blessing that will come through the line of Judah. So we're saving him for last.

First, Rueben. **[v3]** So far it sounds good! But we come to find, these were the kinds of things he was *supposed* to be, as the firstborn, but failed to be. **[v4]** Rueben slept with his father's concubine (35:22). He's an unstable man...like water. *Try standing on water. Not a reliable foundation.* That's why Rueben will not be preeminent. No prophet, priest, or king would come from the line of Rueben. BUT, he's still part of the people of God and his descendants will inherit the land!

Simeon and Levi are addressed together. **[vv5-6]** You know what he's talking about? Ch34 they slaughtered all the men of Shechem because the prince of Shechem defiled their sister. "They hamstrung oxen"—imagery describing senseless brutality.

It's a picture of cutting the tendons in the legs of oxen so that can't walk. Ruthless. **[v7]** This came true. Simeon would be such a small tribe that it gets absorbed by Judah, and Levi doesn't get a tribe of his own. His people will be scattered all over the land.

BUT both are still part of the people of God AND both inherit the land. In fact, the people of Levi become priests in Israel...mediators between God and man. What a blessing!

Jump to *Zebulun* in **[v13]**. The people of Zebulun will have military might. Of all the tribes, Zebulun will contribute the largest military contingent to king David's army.

Consider *Issachar* in **[v14]**. What does that imagery conjure up? He's strong, but lazy. *Sheepfolds* could be translated *saddlebags*. So the imagery is of a strong donkey, carrying bags, but always wanting to take a rest. **[v15]**. They just wanted to take it easy, and it comes back to bite them. They'll eventually live under the control of Canaanite kings.

Dan is hard to pin down. **[v16]** A descendant of Dan will judge Israel. Is that good? **[v17]** This was a horned viper that hid itself in the sand and would strike at the heels of horses/camels, knocking off the rider.

So a guy from the line of Dan will judge Israel in dishonorable ways. Did you know Samson comes from the line of Dan? He's a complex dude who accomplishes great things for God's people, but in questionable ways.

So things aren't looking great for Jacob's sons. I think that's why he cries out in **[v18]**. He trusts the Lord to bring full salvation to his people, even in spite of their shortcomings.

Next, he addresses *Gad*. **[v19]** The tribe of Gad will be in a part of the land vulnerable to raids. But they would learn to fight. In 1 Chron. 12 they're described as "mighty...warriors, expert with shield and spear."

Next, *Asher*. **[v20]** The tribe of Asher would inherit the fertile western part of Galilee. That's why they're described as "rich in food."

BUT they will “yield royal delicacies,” which means they will give up some of the richness of their food. Why? They end up failing to drive out the Canaanites from their land and instead settle with them, sharing food.

Next, *Naphtali*. **[v21]** Naphtali will be fruitful. And they will be like a doe let loose. *Ever seen that? A deer in the open field enjoying its freedom.* Naphtali will have unrestrained joy.

Look now at *Joseph*. **[v22]** This is a picture of Joseph’s godliness; he’s like a tree planted by streams of water. But he experienced much suffering. **[v23]** This is imagery of slander and false accusation, which Joseph experienced much of! **[vv24-26]** He remained steadfast through suffering, and blessing came his way.

Look at *Benjamin*. **[v27]** “Ravenous wolf” depicts reckless and harmful selfishness. Do you know who comes from the line of Benjamin? The first king of Israel, Saul. He was like a ravenous wolf, recklessly and selfishly taking whatever he wanted.

Our sin has consequences. BUT, as one writer said, “all these sinners, along with their sin-damaged offspring are nonetheless incorporated into the line of promise.... Unstable Rueben, violent Simeon and Levi, comfort-loving Issachar, and dangerous Benjamin are all included as part of God’s saving purposes...” (ESV, 425)

Why? Though God’s blessing is appropriately fitted, he is still so faithful and gracious. And I would argue, his faithfulness and grace to his people is appropriately fitted through the blessing given to Judah. Let’s go there (v8).

Pay attention to the crazy amazing things that are said of someone who will come from Judah’s line, and ask yourself: Who could possibly fit these descriptions? **[v8]**

So Judah will be praised. He will be victorious over his enemies (“hand on their neck”). He will be worshiped by all of God’s people (“father’s sons shall bow down”). Then notice the animal he’s compared to. **[v9]** There’s a reason a lion is called the king of jungle.

A lion is a symbol of majesty and strength, which is why a lion becomes the symbol of kingship in Israel. And the picture of a lion crouching is not referring to him about to catch prey; it's referring to him resting. He can sleep wherever he wants! What kind of dumb animal would disrupt the sleep of a lion?

Who's this talking about? Judah? It becomes clear this is talking about a future descendent of Judah. **[v10]** The scepter is rod overladen with metal, symbolizing the king's rule.

This prophecy is saying, "Rule will not leave the line of Judah *until tribute comes to him,*" which could be translated, "until he comes to whom it [the scepter] belongs." In other words, the line of Judah will have a king sitting on the throne until a final king comes, to whom the kingly rule ultimately belongs.

And all peoples will obey him. Not just the people of Israel. ALL peoples of all nations will bow before this lion-like king from the line of Judah. And his rule will bring great flourishing.

[v11] Wine is a symbol of extravagance. There will be so much of it, that a baby donkey can be tied to the best grape vine, and eat all he wants, and it won't matter, because there will be plenty more for everyone! In fact, there will be so much wine, it can be used to wash clothes. Wine will be as abundant as water. Totally flourishing under the rule of this king.

And this king will be full of beauty. **[v12]** The word "darker" could be translated "sparkling." And teeth whiter than milk was impressive in a day when they didn't have Crest White Strips.

This praise-worthy, enemy-crushing, worship-inducing, majestic lion-like king...unmatched in beauty, will bring eternal flourishing for his people. Do you know who this king is? Do you know him? There's a reason...

- In his first public miracle, Jesus turned water into wine.
- He's described as the lion of Judah whose conquered his enemies (sin and Satan)!
- Jesus pictured with eyes of sparkling with fire and hair white as wool (in Revelation).

Jesus Christ is the King of Judah. Do you know him? There is no one like Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Through him true blessing comes. Blessing that makes the things we tag *#blessed* look trivial, as they often are. *Jesus Christ brings the blessing of...*

Adoption into God's family. You were once far off from the family of God, an orphan, he made you his own.

Justification before the judge of the earth. You should rightly be condemned by a holy God for all your sin. Instead you are declared NOT GUILTY because Jesus credits you with his own righteousness.

Full forgiveness and cleansing of sin. You who feel the shame of the dirt of your uncleanness before God...who think, "If any found out the kind of things I've done or thought, I'd be undone...", through Jesus Christ God says, "You're clean/washed!"

New life in him. You who were dead in your sins, following this world, follow your own selfish ways, living for the next buzz this temporal life could offer... Jesus says you to, “Live! I give new life! My life! It’s yours!”

God’s blessing of his people displays his faithfulness, shows forth his grace, and is perfectly fitting because you’re blessed in Christ. Don’t settle for the cheap blessings of this world. Look to Christ, where true blessing is found.