

## Genesis 48 A Final Act of Faith

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro  
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Hebrews 11:1 says, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” If I could put that another way for you, *faith is belief that is acted upon*. That’s what the rest of Hebrews 11 shows us, it is a list of men and women throughout the Bible who had and demonstrated faith.

It recounts the actions of Abel, Enoch, and Noah and then it digs into the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Joseph. Then, it moves on to Moses, Joshua, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson and King David, and many others – some of them had significant accomplishments, others endured terrible persecutions, but the point of it is all is that they took action based on their beliefs.

They had faith that God would do *‘that,’* so they did *‘this.’*

So, what was Jacob’s big deal? What did the author of Hebrews point out as his big moment of faith? Listen: “By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff” (Heb 11:21).

That’s what we’re going to see this morning – the big moment of faith in Jacob’s life and how it played out. He knows he is at the end of his life, and now he is taking the time to set things in order.

Jacob adopts his own grandsons giving them an equal share of the inheritance with their uncles – what he is doing is effectively giving Joseph a double portion by giving directly to the boys. Now, that seems a little odd to us, but it’s not what we’re going to focus on this morning. Because instead of looking at *what* Jacob did, we’re going to look at *why* he did it.

Remember, we said that faith is belief that is acted upon. So we’re going to look at what he believed that made him act the way did.

1 Now it came to pass after these things that Joseph was told, “Indeed your father *is* sick”; and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

Joseph gets word that his dad isn’t doing well; so he rushes down to see him. Now think about this – because this is you all. Joseph has a big time government job in the nation’s capital – his dad lives in another area. When he gets word that dad is sick he has to take off from work and travel to get there – and, like some of you, he’s hoping dad is still alive when he gets there, that it won’t be too late.

Joseph brings his sons with him, so they get to see their grandpa, and so that he can see them one last time. Those of you who have had a parent or grandparent die know something of what this is like. You know the thoughts and the feelings that go along with these moments. The Bible is full of real people living real life events, there's stuff here that we can relate to.

[2](#) And Jacob was told, "Look, your son Joseph is coming to you"; and Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed.

My wife is an RN, she has spent her whole career working in ICUs, and she has noticed this interesting phenomenon: right before people die, they seem to get a little better for a short period of time, maybe a day, usually just a few hours and it seems like it is their last rally of strength, their last time to say good bye.

That is what we see Jacob doing here – he's mustering his last bit of strength to say his good byes and set his family in order.

[3](#) Then 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 multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.' [5](#) And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, *are* mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. [6](#) Your offspring whom you beget after them shall be yours; they will be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. [7](#) But as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way, when *there was* but a little distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)."

[8](#) Then Israel saw Joseph's sons, and said, "Who *are* these?"

[9](#) Joseph said to his father, "They *are* my sons, whom God has given me in this *place*." And he said, "Please bring them to me, and I will bless them." [10](#) Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, *so that* he could not see. Then Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. [11](#) And Israel said to Joseph, "I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!"

[12](#) So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth. [13](#) And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought *them* near him.

[14](#) Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid *it* on Ephraim's head, who *was* the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh *was* the firstborn. [15](#) And he blessed Joseph, and said:

"God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,  
The God who has fed me all my life long to this day,

[16](#) The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil,  
Bless the lads;

Let my name be named upon them,

And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;  
And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.”

Now remember, faith is belief that is acted upon. Jacob is taking action; he is adopting his grandsons. In order to explain *why* Jacob is doing what he is doing, he opens up by giving his testimony. He talks about how God Almighty appeared to him and blessed him. If you weren't here you can download the message on this, but we saw it in Genesis 28 where God first stepped into Jacob's life.

Jacob was on the run trying to get away from his dad whom he had just deceived and his brother whom he had just betrayed and right there, in the midst of his sin, God came crashing into his life and said I'm going to do this amazing thing for you, not because you deserve it, none of us could ever deserve it, but just because I want to show my grace. And suddenly Jacob's life began to turn in a different direction BECAUSE he was now in a relationship with the living God.

He tells his son and his grandsons more about this God as he prays for them. Look at verses 15-16 again.

When he starts his prayer, Jacob calls on God, and this is how he identifies Him: “God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has fed me all my life long to this day, The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads;” and he goes on from there.

There are three major points we can see here about God and they line up perfectly with the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jacob begins with identifying which god he is praying to. He is the “God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked.” In other words, this God existed before I ever came along – I did not make Him up, He made me.

There's a great song by a man named Rich Mullins – spend the 99 cents on iTunes and download his song “*Creed*.” Not the group Creed, the song Creed, by Rich Mullins or there's a more rockin' version by Third Day. The lyrics are taken from the core tenants of the Christian Faith, what is called the Apostle's Creed, and it's set to music.

The chorus says,

“I believe what I believe is what makes me what I am  
I did not make it no it is making me  
It is the very truth of God and not the invention of any man”

Can I tell you that that is where the battle is today? I am growing convinced that this is the unseen issue that is causing so many problems in people's understanding of “god” today. It's that people are writing their own definition of God. They are inventing a god that suits

their beliefs and preferences. They stroll through life with a plate for their “religion” or “spirituality” and they load it up with whatever they want, whatever seems the most palatable to them. It’s not the God of their fathers, it’s a god they have made to suit their own preferences, but it’s a god that doesn’t actually exist.

We hear a lot about atheists and humanists and scientific evolutionists who doubt or deny the existence of god. But they are *very* small minority of the population. They are vocal, but they are small. The overwhelming majority of people in America today, and here in our own area, believe in a god of some sort. Well over 2/3rds of them specifically *think* they believe in the God of the Christian Bible. The problem is they don’t really.

They don’t believe what the Bible has to say about Him or what He has to say through the Bible. They define god according to their own ideas and that’s what’s so dangerous. They *think* they know about Him, they *think* they pray to Him, but they’re missing the mark by a long shot.

Their god wouldn’t send people to hell. Their god wouldn’t let people hurt. Their god understands the way they are and doesn’t call their sins sin. He’s not harsh or judgmental. Their god says ‘it’s alright, I’m just here to help you out when you get in a bind, you don’t need to actually worry about obeying me.’ “I’m just here to give you a sense of comfort and make you happy.” Where do you get that sort of god? You make him up.

I’ve had several conversations with people lately that were doing this, they were creating their own religion. Now, they didn’t call it that. I don’t think many people would be so bold as to say it that way, but that’s what they were doing.

They read a little bit of the Bible, a book or two by the Dalai Lama; had a few conversations with some Mormons, studied with some Jehovah’s Witnesses. They were not anti-god people at all, they were just trying to piece together their own god and their own religion by taking a little bit from here and a little bit from there to put together something that made sense to them. It’s consumerism in the religious realm, and it’s everywhere in America today. Some of you sitting here this morning might be guilty of the very thing!

God Almighty, the God Jacob is praying to here, won’t let you do that. You either take all of Him, or none of Him. You either are His child or you are not. He has no stepchildren, no half children, only those He has fully adopted and those who refuse to come on His terms.

Which brings us to another point – He may be the god of your fathers, but at some point He has to become *your* God. You can’t stand under the umbrella of your mom or your dad or your grandma’s relationship with God – you have to have a relationship of your own.

Again, this is something I see in counseling all the time – people went to church with someone growing up – mom, dad, grandma, a friend, whatever. They heard what the preacher said, they know a few stories from the Bible, but they never made a commitment, they never surrendered their lives and said “God, I see that You are right and I am wrong.

Please forgive me for my rebellion and my disobedience, for my sin. I want to obey you now, I want, with Your help, to live a life that is pleasing to You. You tell me, and You help me, and my life is Yours.”

The people I've been counseling never had that moment. So now they're at this place where life hurts, where they're getting crushed and they want to know what is going on and whether maybe God can help. And I sit there and tell them, you may have some information about God, but you haven't had any transformation from Him and that information isn't going to do you any good until you submit your life to Him. Because He doesn't just want to make your painful symptoms go away, he wants to cure you of the disease of sin that is wrecking your life and causing all the symptoms you just walked in here and cried about.

And you know what, none of them have been ready to do that when we talked. They have all wanted a little more time to think about it. To think about whether they should accept what I am saying, which is drawn from the Bible, or to cling to what they think about God.

So I challenge you this morning – who is the god you think of? Is He God Almighty? Can you say, “I did not make Him, no He has made me” or do you have a god you have put together like a quilt from the scraps you have found here and there, making a god that makes sense to you? .....

Well, we need to move on to the next thing Jacob says – “the God who has fed me all my life long to this day.” Now the word translated here as fed, is the Hebrew word *ra'ah*, which is also translated as shepherd, in fact, some of your translations may have the word “shepherded” instead of the NKJV's ‘fed.’ Jacob worships the God who has shepherded him. It's the exact same word we find in Psalm 23 – “The Lord is my Shepherd...”

So here we see the aspect of God as the Holy Spirit who leads and guides us and like a shepherd takes care of us and feeds us. But you understand there is much, much more here than just making sure you get to Chipotle after church. The idea here is complete care, like a sheep is dependent upon a shepherd to lead him where there is green grass and clean water, and to make sure he is safe from predators.

You see, when you entrust your life to this God, when you allow Him to shape and lead you instead of trying to shape Him, He provides for you. Think of all the analogies we have in the Bible – God as the shepherd, us as the sheep; Jesus and the husband, the church as His bride; God as our Father, us as His children. In each instance, He is the provider and we are the receiver. God takes care of His children, and even when life is rough, He is there to strengthen and guide us. The shepherd of Ps 23 leads the sheep to lie down in green pastures by still waters, but even when they go through the valley of the shadow of death, they “fear no evil for His rod and staff” comfort them.

And finally, Jacob says this is “The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil.” Here we see the work of Jesus, our redeemer. His work of redemption makes it possible for us to be

adopted back into God's family so that we can worship Him and be shepherded by Him. Paul says in his letter to Titus, chapter 2, verse 14, that Jesus "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."

Remember, none of us are born into a relationship with God – we think of Him as Father, but He is our adopted Father, we have to be received by Him. It is Jesus that makes that adoption possible by redeeming us. What does that mean? Well, you redeem something when you give something you have to get something you want. Think of credit card points or frequent flier miles – you give them to the airline or the credit card company and they give you something you want. That's what Jesus did for us, He offered up Himself, He was poured out, we might say He was spent on the cross and in the process received us.

This is the God that Jacob knows and worships. This is the God who has blessed him and whose blessings, especially in the form of inherited land, he wants to pass on to his grandchildren. *What* is he doing? Adopting his grandsons. *Why* is he doing it? Because he believes in the promises of this God. He is acting in faith – taking action on the basis of what he believes.

[17](#) Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. [18](#) And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for 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; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations."

[20](#) So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!'" And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh.

[21](#) Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. [22](#) Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."

Jacob, or Israel, is making known his last will and testament on the basis of his beliefs in a great, great, God. He is walking by faith and the author of Hebrews calls it worship. Remember? "By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning on his staff."

Worship isn't just the songs we sing – it's the life that we live. It's the choices that we make based on the revelation of God that we have received. Each step of faith you take is an act of worship.

So my question to you this morning is: are you living a life of faith? Are you living out what you say you believe? And more importantly than that, do you know *this* God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Is He your Shepherd and your Redeemer?

Or, are you making up your own god out of little pieces here and there? You wouldn't be here this morning if you weren't open to some kind of 'religion,' but what god are you seeking – the One who made you or the one you are making?

You need to settle that question, and then worship by faith.