



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Genesis 48: 1-22

“Jacob Blessing Joseph’s Sons”

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading this morning is from the 48th chapter of the Book of Genesis. In our last study the preceding chapter the 47th in which Jacob was presented to Pharaoh by Joseph, then some words were given concerning the way in which Joseph managed the famine, and finally near the end of the chapter some details concerning the last days of Jacob. Three times in the last few chapters of the Book of Genesis, Joseph comes to the bedside of Jacob and we are looking now at the second of these occurrences in chapter 48 of the Book of Genesis.

“Now it came about after these things that Joseph was told, ‘Behold, your father is sick.’ So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim with him. When it was told to Jacob, ‘Behold, your son Joseph has come to you,’ Israel collected his strength and sat up in the bed. Then Jacob said to Joseph, ‘God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, (Luz is one of the other names for Bethel) and He said to me, ‘Behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession.’ ‘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.’”

Well, that verse incidentally is one that’s very important and we will be looking at it in a little more detail later. I want you to notice in particular the statement that your two sons are mine and then in the sixth verse, Jacob continues,

“But your offspring that have been born after them shall be yours; they shall be called by the names of their brothers in their inheritance. Now as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, in the land of Canaan on the journey, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath that is, Bethlehem.’ When Israel saw Joseph’s sons, he said, ‘Who are these?’ and Joseph said to his father, ‘They are my sons, whom God has given me here.’ So he said, ‘Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them.’ Now the eyes of Israel were so dim from age that he could not see. Then Joseph brought them close to 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 children as well.’ Then Joseph took them from his knees, and bowed with his face to the ground.”

So evidently Joseph realizing this is an important occasion and desirous of the blessing of the two, takes Ephraim and Manasseh from between the knees of Jacob and moves them back a little bit and he himself bows down to the ground before his father. Then he takes the two boys and moves them up in a very solemn official kind of position in order that the elderly man may bless them. The 13th verse reads.

“And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel’s left, and Manasseh with his left hand near Israel’s right, and brought them close to him.’ ‘And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh’s head, crossing his hands or guiding his hands knowingly it has been translated, although Manasseh was the firstborn.”

Now remember the firstborn received certain blessings, usually a double inheritance, a double share of the inheritance, and then certain other blessings by which he became the mediator of the divine knowledge. So it was a rather important thing to be the firstborn. Then we read in the 15th verse,

“And he blessed Joseph evidently in the person of his two sons. ‘And he blessed Joseph, and said, ‘The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,’ ‘The angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; And may my name live on in them, And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.’ When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on Ephraim’s head, it displeased him; and he grasped his father’s hand to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head and Joseph said to his father, ‘Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn. Place your right hand on his head.’ But his father refused and said, ‘I know, my son, I know; he shall become a people and he also shall be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.’ And he blessed them that day, saying, ‘By you Israel shall pronounce blessing, saying, ‘May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!’” Then he put Ephraim before Manasseh. Then Israel said to Joseph, ‘Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers. ‘I give you one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow.’”

That last verse by the way is a very difficult verse and the commentators have discussed it at great length. It’s not certain exactly what Jacob has in mind in saying that. I suggest sometime when you have a little time, look up the parallel references and see if they are the incident referred to here. It may be that this is some incident not referred to elsewhere in the word.

Well, may the Lord bless this reading of the Bible.

The subject for this morning in the exposition of the Book of Genesis is “Jacob Blessing Joseph’s Sons or Jacob’s Greatest Act of Faith.” What is the most remarkable act of faith according to the Scriptures that Joseph ever accomplished? One looking over his life might say well, that’s very simple. It was the experience that he had at Peniel when he wrestled with the angel who turned out to be the Lord Jesus Christ and Scripture said that he prevailed over the Lord God. Surely that would be the most remarkable act of faith on the part of Jacob.

Well, evidently it is not. It’s not singled out by the writer of The Epistle to the Hebrews at least. Could it have been Bethel? Bethel was the place where he saw that remarkable vision of the ladder that reached from earth to heaven and the angels of God were ascending and descending upon it. And Bethel made a great impression upon him because even here late in life, he recalls again the thing that happened to him at Bethel and the promises that God gave him there. But evidently that wasn’t the most remarkable act of faith.

Was it the incident when the angels appeared to him at Mahanaim and strengthened him as he was on the way to meet Esau? No, that’s not singled out for special mention.

Out of the long career of Jacob, the event that is singled out by the writer of The Epistle to the Hebrews and set down in Scripture as Jacob’s act of faith is this event of chapter 48, Jacob blessing the sons of Joseph. In the 21st verse of Hebrews chapter 11, the writer of that epistle says, “By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff.” So this is singled out as a special manifestation of faith on the part of Jacob.

It’s probably not the incident that we would have thought would be the expression of faith from the Patriarch Jacob, but in a sense it is one of the great incidents in Jacob’s life in which the nature of faith shines forth very plainly. The writer of that epistle had said faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. And the characteristic of faith, that conviction of things that are not yet seen, is the conviction that the really important things are the invisible

things, the immaterial things, the future things. That characteristic shines out in this experience of Jacob.

It’s very much like the experience of Noah. By faith, Noah prepared an ark for the salvation of his household. It was the conviction of things not seen that led him to do that. By faith, Abraham when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place of which he knew nothing practically. That was, too, an expression of faith as the conviction of things not seen. When Abraham offered up Isaac, he considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type and so in Abraham's life, there was manifested faith as hope or conviction of things not seen. And Moses, Moses was an individual of whom the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews comments that he looked to the reward, that he endured as seeing him who is unseen, and that he also in speaking of Moses’ faith, he speaks also of the fact that what was it, I was looking for here, he was looking for the reward, and so in Moses’ life, there also was that conviction of things that are not seen.

In the remainder of the instances of faith in Hebrews chapter 11, that characteristic of faith shines forth, the conviction of things not seen. It may well be that this is the thing that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews thinks is the important thing in the life of Jacob, the conviction of things that are not seen. One interesting thing about this incident is that it is the blessing of Manasseh and Ephraim, and Jacob has already been an important character in a previous blessing, but in this blessing it was the stolen blessing or the blessing that he received from Isaac instead of Esau, and he manifested as you know a great deal of gall in managing to be the recipient of that blessing. This time however there is no gall in the blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh. It’s almost an object lesson for us in the quiet responsiveness of faith, and no doubt the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews singles this out for that reason.

We are brought here to an old man’s deathbed. There are different ways in which you can come to your deathbed. You can come to your deathbed in faith and you can come to your deathbed in unbelief. And one sees the great benefit of coming to one’s deathbed in faith here.

Here is a man who is sick. The Scriptures say that he is sick here and that’s a word that means something like worn down or infirm by reason of age and disease, but even though he is sick on his deathbed, the Lord God is with him and sustaining him, and this elevated state of mind that comes to Jacob as he blesses his sons or grandsons is the product of the sustaining power of truth. And one sees that you know in the experiences of life, those that come to their deathbed in faith come to their deathbed with something to sustain them and those who do not, face death in the fear that God implants in the heart of all men.

You see Jacob here on his deathbed, but he is the object of divine inspiration. God speaks through him with reference to Ephraim and Manasseh and he guides his hands over the heads of those two boys knowingly, that is by the Holy Spirit’s direction and is the means of the accomplishment of one of the great acts that affects the history of Israel down through the centuries. In addition, he is the mediator of far-reaching divine promises concerning these boys. He says that they shall be fruitful, that they shall be a great multitude. He also says that Ephraim shall be greater than Manasseh, and that’s what happened, and he says that Israel in the future shall reflect so upon the blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh that that will be a standard blessing and they will say, May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh. So he is the mediator of far-reaching divine promises, and of course he is a witness to the divine faithfulness.

The same man who said few and evil are my days, says in the next chapter that the angel has redeemed me from all evil. It does matter how we look at the experiences of life. I think as far as I am concerned, the most striking thing about chapter 48 and the thing that I most remember when I think of Genesis 48 is this that he is the object and the subject of one of the most revealing acts of Scripture, the crossed hands over the heads of those two boys, Ephraim and Manasseh.

The first seven verses of the 48th chapter record for us the adoption of Joseph’s sons and here is a lesson for liberal theologians. So if there is a liberal theologian lurking in the audience, or if there is some individual who is not a theologian but just liberal, and does not really think that it is possible for a God to look at an individual and reckon him to be righteous even though he is

unrighteous in himself, then this is the section for you. We often read in theological literature if we are reading some of the liberal theologians that the idea that God may reckon a man righteous by virtue of the merits of another person, well that’s legal fiction. It’s not really true, it’s not really right for God to look at an individual and reckon to him the benefits of someone else when he admittedly is a sinner.

Now the Bible makes a great deal of this. The Bible says that by virtue of the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are justified, but the Bible goes on to say that we are still sinners. In fact, James calls us just that. He says that we are sinners. So how is it possible for a sinner to stand righteous before the Lord God? Well, students of Scripture have pointed out that it is by virtue of the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has come as the representative man, and he has died bearing the punishment of his people, and by virtue of faith, God reckons to those who are his people the benefits of the death of Christ, and they stand righteous in the righteousness of the Son of God, and so the Bible says among other things that we are accepted in the Beloved One. That is, when God looks down from heaven and looks at a believing Christian, he does not see him in his sins, though he is a sinner, he sees him clothed with the righteousness of God, he sees him in Christ. He has been made a joint heir with Jesus Christ. He possesses the righteousness of God, because he has identified with him. In his substitute, he has already borne the judgment for sin, and because he has borne the judgment for sin in his substitute, even Heaven can bring no further charge against the one for whom Jesus Christ died. His penalty has been paid. That is why we rejoice in the saving death of the Lord Jesus Christ because he has borne all of our judgment, and therefore even heaven cannot bring any charge against the individual who is identified with his substitute. So he has died for his people’s sin and we stand in him. So we have reckoned to us that -- the Bible uses over and over again the term “reckoned righteous” to justify means to declare righteous individuals who are not righteous in themselves, but stand in righteousness because someone has borne their judgment.

Now call it legal fiction if you will, but the Bible does not. The Bible calls it a reality. We do possess the righteousness of God in Christ. It's not legal fiction.. As a matter of fact, the Bible is full

of this idea and we have it again right here in the adoption of Joseph’s sons. Now the occasion is described in the first verse. Word comes to Joseph that Jacob is sick and he is one hundred and forty seven years of age now and surely he does not have many days left. And so Joseph gathers his two sons to himself and says we are going to visit your grandfather, and he takes off for Jacob’s place, taking his two sons with him.

Now word comes to Jacob that Joseph is on the way and he wants to see you. And so we read in the second verse that Israel collected his strength and sat up in bed. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews adds, “He worshipped leaning upon the top of his staff.” Now that may be a reference to the preceding chapter and the last verse of that, but you can imagine that Joseph repeated something of the same thing here because it says here that he sat up in bed. I can just imagine the other members of the family gathered around the bed of the ancient patriarch, and there is a saying, as he begins to move in his bed, because he doesn’t see very well and he has been sick, lying on the bed, now he is trying to get up, he is raising himself up on his elbows, and you can hear the voices from around the bed: now father don’t move, watch out, don’t get up.

And finally Jacob says get me out of this bed because he has strengthened himself. The Scripture says he has strengthened himself and this man who is a hundred and forty-seven years of age and sick in his last days has charge of his own destiny as well as his own death. But nevertheless he is an old and sick man in his dotage, and when Joseph comes, he begins to look into the past. Like so many of us who become old men, we look to the past. And he says God Almighty, Joseph appeared to me at last at Bethel in the land of Canaan and he blessed me, and he said to me behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous and I will make you a company of peoples and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession, 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.

Now you know this is a wonderful scene. Here is an old man. He has managed to get himself up. He has collected himself for some last few words, and there is the prime minister of

Egypt before him with his two young sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and the people are gathered around the bed and they are wondering what this old man is going to do now. They think that maybe he will fall off the bed or something like that, but he is going to give some of the great words of Holy Scripture. One of the preachers on this text has said, “Is this is a scene that has been invented? Why if this scene is invented, then Shakespeare is just a scribbling copyboy.”

What a legacy for a father to leave to his children; a legacy of acquaintance with the Lord God of heaven. We think that our father has been good when he leaves his children some real estate and some securities, and if he does that, then he has been a good father. The greatest thing that a father can leave his children is the heritage of the knowledge of God. The greatest thing that you can do for your children is to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord God. You cannot give them any inheritance that is greater than that, and if you give them all of these other things and fail there, you have failed as a father and you have failed as a mother. The greatest thing that you can do is just what Jacob leaves for his children.

But now look at what he is saying. He says now Joseph your two sons are mine. Now you might say well, after all he is a grandfather. He is just talking about his children. They are his children. Well, of course, in that sense, that’s true, but there is more to it than that. Did you notice how he describes these two boys? He says they are mine, but he says Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine as Reuben and Simeon are. Now Reuben and Simeon are his real children. So what he is saying is that I am adopting Manasseh and Ephraim and I am making them my children just as Reuben and Simeon are my children. In other words, they are going to become one of the leaders of the Tribes of Israel.

Now you may not know it, but there were not twelve tribal figures in Israel. There were thirteen because Joseph is given two places, Ephraim and Manasseh, and later there is the tribe of Ephraim and there is the tribe of Manasseh. Now Levi was the tribe that belonged to the Lord, for they ministered about the Tabernacle, and the twelve tribes among whom the land was divided included the two sons of Joseph. And so when he says they are mine, he means just exactly that they

are mine. He has adopted them as his own children and they stand just like Reuben and Simeon did as the sons of Jacob.

Now an interesting thing about this is that they were introduced into the inheritance of Joseph. Now Joseph is standing there. He is the heir of Jacob, but these two are introduced into the heirship of someone who is living and is the heir. Now that is the precise way in which we are introduced into heirship of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says that we are joint heirs with Jesus Christ. He is the heir and we are introduced into the sharing of his heirship so that we share as the sons of God in the firstborn’s right and privileges of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now this is biblical adoption and this is also imputation for these two sons are reckoned from this time on to have been the sons of Jacob. Now they are not the sons of Jacob. They are the sons of Joseph, but they are reckoned by the Bible to be the sons of Jacob. That is precisely what happens when we who are sinners are through faith reckoned righteous by virtue of the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ and so we have imputation. Call it legal fiction if you wish, but only liberal theologians call it legal fiction. The Bible calls it imputation and the imputation of a position before the Lord God.

Now there is so much about this chapter that is human. He goes on to say that God has been good to him. He says your offspring that had been born after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the names of their brothers and their inheritance. Now being an old man in his dotage, his mind wanders off for a moment and he says now is for me. When I came from Paddan, Rachel died to my sorrow in the land of Canaan. Joseph is standing before him and Joseph is the firstborn of Rachel and Joseph standing before him now reminds him of his beloved Rachel. Now Jacob was a man who had children by four wives, but Rachel was his beloved and he wanders back in this poignant glance to his relationship with Rachel and to the fact that she died on the way to Bethlehem. And you can just see this old man. He is thinking about that, and it’s hard for him to come back to the present. You know like old men do; they tend to dwell in the past and they tell their stories over and over and over again. You’ve heard them three and four and five times and one

benefit of this is you learn those stories real well. You’ve heard them six or eight times. It's characteristic of old people. They don’t remember that they have told you that before.

Now I’ve said to you a number of times you know I am an old man and so when I start telling the same story over in the same message, then of course you will want to be worried and go to one of the elders and say, well I think it's time to retire Dr. Johnson. [Laughter]

Now that reminds me about old men. They are always telling the same old stories over and over again. [More laughter] Well, I don’t know whether you could or whether your... I just wanted to see that you are awake this morning. Well, it's an effort for him to return to the present and so he looks out and he sees these figures before him and he says, who are these? He has been talking about Ephraim and Manasseh and he says, who are these, and so Joseph said, these are my sons whom God has given me here. Bring them to me here please that I may bless them.

Now the eyes of Israel were so dim from age that he couldn’t see, and so Joseph brought them very close to him and he kissed them and embraced them. Now isn’t that interesting these two boys by the way, have been brought up in Egypt so far as we know, and Joseph was the prime minister and so they were trained to be aristocrats in Egypt, which was the greatest kingdom of that day. And now in this act in which Jacob blesses them, they are to be joined to the despised people of Israel because they were shepherds and shepherds are an abomination to the Egyptians. So he brings them to him and he kisses them and embraces them and this is an affectionate a preliminary to the blessing that follows.

The Bible incidentally speaks about individuals in the last days as individuals who are without natural affection. You can see that Jacob does not qualify. He may have been a trickster, he may have been a supplanter, he may have been crooked in his earlier days, but this you can say about him, he is a warm humble trickster and supplanter and crooked fellow. Now imagine that Jacob is the kind of man who would have put on the back of his wagon, ask me about my grandchildren [laughter], because he brings them to himself and kisses them and embraces them. I like that, because I think that that’s something that should be manifested in the families of the saints, that

natural affection of the grandfather for the son and for the grandchildren. Well, they are brought before him, and Joseph is very careful. He realizes this is important. He knows that the blessing conveyed by the patriarch of the family who is the priest of the family -- and that’s what Jacob was in those days. He realizes that this is important and so he takes the boys out from the legs of Jacob and brings them back just a little bit and he himself bows down to the ground and then he takes the boys and very carefully seeing Jacob’s right hand and his left hand before him and knowing of course that Manasseh is the firstborn, he arranges them so as he pushes them forward with his left hand, he pushes Manasseh over in front of Jacob’s right hand. And Ephraim with his right hand he pushes over in front of Jacob’s left hand. So it would be easy for Jacob just to reach out the natural thing and put his right hand on the hard top of the head of Manasseh and his left hand on the top of Ephraim. That’s what we read about here in verses 12 and 13, but he is horrified, upset, and displeased to notice that as Jacob reaches out his hands, he takes his right hand and puts it over on the head of Ephraim and then his left hand he puts over on the head of Manasseh, and so he has the two boys before him just like this and he begins to speak in the blessing.

Now the Bible says that he laid his hands crosswise. That Hebrew verb used there – *sakal* in that particular form -- is a form that most of the lexicographers think means something like “to lay crosswise” in the Authorized Version, because this word is related to a word that has to do with knowledge or wisdom, translated guiding his hands knowingly, in reference to the Holy Spirit guiding Jacob. Now I am not exactly sure really which one of these translations is correct, both of them of course express truth. He was guided surely by the Spirit of God. I will say more about that later.

But at any rate he puts his hand on one and then the hand on the other. And he expresses the blessing. And it’s not surprising, of course, Joseph doesn’t enter up because this is very solemn. He will enter up later on, but Jacob is now speaking and he is giving the blessing, and it’s not surprising that he should begin by saying the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked. Incidentally, when he said he blessed Joseph, he means that he blesses Joseph’s sons. Joseph is blessed in his two sons’ blessing. It’s a collective expression there for the two sons. They

stand as Joseph before him because they represent him. So the blessing is the blessing of Joseph, but it's particularly the blessing of Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh. And he begins by reminding them of the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked. It's great to have a family tradition of piety and I said a moment ago that there is nothing greater than that you can leave your children than this tradition for piety. Nurture your children up in the admonition of the Lord. If you have not done that, you have not given them the greatest thing you can give them. Give them all the stocks and bonds and land and other things, it will not compare with the riches of the tradition for piety and truth that you can convey to them as parents. Some people are more interested in their girls having grace in their feet than grace in their heads, and they are more interested in their sons being successful in business or being able to hit a home run than they are in having them know the Lord God. You have failed men and you have failed women if you have not communicated this to your children, the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Now this blessing is remarkable because it's kind of a triune blessing. Did you notice it? The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked? The God who has been by shepherd all my life to this day? The angel who has redeemed me from all evil? Now you don't have to be a student of Genesis too much to realize that when he says the angel, his thoughts go back no doubt to the angel of Jehovah with whom he wrestled at Peniel, and it was there that he came to understand that he had seen the face of God. So the angel is a reference to our Lord Jesus Christ and his preincarnate glory. So here we have a threefold paraphrases for the deity, and it's interesting that if you will look in the 16th verse at the verb “bless,” it's in the singular. So we have the three persons referred to: the God, the God, the angel, and then we have bless.

Now of course this is not a revelation of the Trinity, but it's in thorough accord with the Trinity. He speaks of a God who wills, who works, and who protects His people. Now the fact that he mentions the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac is natural and understandable because it is this covenant God who has stated the faith of Jacob and so many circumstances in his life. It would be interesting to go back right at this point and to go back in Jacob's life and to see the places where

the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac steadied him and protected him and kept him somewhere near the will of God for him.

He also speaks about this God as being his shepherd all his life to this day. The Authorized Version renders it “who fed me all my life to this day.” So the shepherding is a feeding. Incidentally this is probably the thing that ultimately is expressed in Scripture by David when he speaks about the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. It is Jacob who originates this idea of the Lord being his shepherd, the one who has fed him. He does not say he has followed this God, but he says this God has been my shepherd.

Jacob has followed the Lord very much like a dog follows his master. He walks with him for a little while, sees something and runs off and sniffs around that, and his father has to call him back and this is the story of Jacob’s life. He has not followed very well, but this covenant-keeping God has kept after him and brought him to himself and now he is like an old dog that just lies near his master and here he is like that.

He speaks about the angel and that’s the reference to Peniel. Isn’t it interesting too that here in chapter 48, he has such a different viewpoint. In chapter 47 when he appeared before Pharaoh seventeen years before this, he said in the 9th verse of that preceding chapter, “The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning.” So his days have been few and evil, but Jacob is speaking about Jacob there. Here he speaks about the angel who has redeemed me from all evil. There, few and evil have been my days; here, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil.

You see it's possible to have two strangely different views of the same life. Jacob’s life is described in the preceding chapter like a cloudy day, but now it's described like a sunny day for the sun when it comes out how things blossom and begin to gleam and shine in the sun and you see things you do not see on a cloudy day. In one, he says few and evil have been his days, in the other

he says he has been redeemed from all evil. So the evils have stormed over Jacob but he is still there. That’s the important thing.

Now in the preceding chapter, everything is Jacob. The days have been few and evil. It's my pilgrimage. It's me, this, because he is looking at things from his own standpoint, but here he is looking at things from the divine standpoint, and it's the angel who has redeemed me from all evil. Have you ever noticed that the mountains look quite different when you are close to them from the way they look in the distance? Now why anyone would want to go to Colorado and see those mountains up there, I don't know. If you have ever been over to the southeast and looked at the Smoky Mountains, why you would ever want to go out there and look at those piles of rock and dirt, I have no idea why you would want to do that.

Go over and get close to one of those mountains in Colorado and travel up on the little ways. What do you see? Just boulders lying around, dirt mounds here and there. There is just nothing there. You wonder what in the world is this. Is this the trash heap of God's creation that he has just piled up things over here like this and so you wonder about those mountains, but then if you will get off five and ten miles away, they become beautiful sights indeed, I must confess, to see those snow-capped peaks and then the various colors that play over those piles of rock and dirt. It's amazing, they are beautiful. When you are close, they don't look very pretty, but when you get off, they really look beautiful.

Now you can look at your life like that. In the midst of your trials and difficulties, you may think that things are going very bad, but if you will get off and look at your life from the distance and look at it in the light of the Lord God, then things are different and that's what Jacob is doing and he is illustrating for us the wisdom of taking the brighter view of life, looking at our life from the standpoint of the distance and look back and see the way the Lord God has fed you all the days of your life.

Now Joseph is listening because of course his father is his father and he has great respect for him. It's sad you know when displeasure enters a person's life because God's will has crossed the

desire that we have. Now he wanted Manasseh to have the blessing of the firstborn because he was the firstborn and he wanted Ephraim to be blessed. And so he is very displeased that Jacob has blessed Ephraim and has given him the firstborn rights and while he has blessed Manasseh, he has not given him what Joseph thinks ought to be his.

You see the law of primogeniture is not being upheld again. Now [if] Joseph had thought for a moment he might have realized that this is the sovereign working of God through the Patriarch Jacob who had the rights of the firstborn himself. He may have remembered that it was Ishmael who was the firstborn, but it was Isaac in whom the seed would be called. He may have remembered that in the case of Jacob and Esau, it was Esau who was born first but it was Jacob who was blessed with the firstborn rights, and so here again, Manasseh is the firstborn but Ephraim is given the rights of the firstborn. Reuben has lost them because of his great sin, and Judah is the one through whom the seed shall come. Ephraim has firstborn rights among the Tribes of Israel. So all of this illustrates again the fact that God wants to make very plain to us that nature does not necessarily inherit the things of God.

If he had always down the line had the oldest inherit the blessing, we might have gotten the idea that the natural man is to be blessed by God, but he reverses things over and over again to remind us that if a man is going to be blessed in his sin, it must be by grace, and so the first Adam is rejected and the last Adam is the one who has firstborn rights by virtue of his saving work on Calvary's cross. It's a beautiful illustration of the fact that we are not blessed because we do good works or because we have a certain position in society; we are blessed in grace and in sovereign grace. It's one of those things that the Bible makes so very plain, that it is God who is responsible for the blessing of man and he sovereignly blesses.

He does not ask us, do you think it's fair for me to do this? He does what his will determines should be done, and whatever his will determines should be done is right. That is the determination of what is right. He does not do something because it's right. He doesn't do his will

because it's right. Something is right because it is the expression of his will. That is the ultimate determinant of what is right.

When I came home from Winona Lake where I am teaching a course at Grace Theological Seminary for these two weeks, yesterday I was looking over some of the mail that had been put on my desk and there was a letter from a young boy from the state of Mis’sippi. Now that’s the way these people in Mississippi call their state. They call it Mis’sippi and this young man is a person who has listened to the tapes for a few years because of someone else over there who is a preacher and evidently he has been listening and learning and he is now preaching himself, though he has only been saved by three years. He is preaching in some of those Baptist churches over there in Mis’sippi and they really need it over there, too.

In this letter, now he speaks and he is saying the reason I am writing is to express my appreciation to you and Believers Chapel for the work you are all doing for our Lord. Also I would like to ask your opinion. My question is this, how is the best way in which to present the sovereign grace of God and not offend weaker believers in the process, or is this an impossibility? Now I am going to give him a private word on this tape because he would probably be listening to it one of these days: Randy, it is an impossibility. [Laughter] You cannot help but offend people. You even offend theological students. You offend theological faculty members. You offend Christian institutions. But that’s all right. It's in the Bible.

He says, “I have seen in the short time that the Lord has given me in His work that the doctrines of election, predestination, and effectual calling scare the life out of most church members. In our part of the country, northeast Mississippi, church members are torn between hardshell-ism on the one extreme, and freewill-ism on the other. Moreover, spiritual maturity is very low even among faithful church members.” That’s one of the reasons for the difficulty.

Well it's the sovereign blessing of God. There is no other way to explain why Jacob guided by the Holy Spirit took his right hand and put it on the head of Ephraim and his left hand on the head of Manasseh. So far as we know, it was the sovereign direction of God. Manasseh may have

come out of that and said, I don’t like my grandfather. He was not fair. I am the one who is the old one and he gave my blessing to the younger one. Now I would not have wanted to have been around to try to explain that to the young man. It's just in Scripture; it was God’s will that that take place and of course, he taught us some things by that. He teaches us that the blessing of God comes through his sovereign grace. That’s how it comes to us.

The thing to do is to not object, but to bow to it and respond to it in that way and then we will receive the blessing as well and when we get to heaven, we will find out the reason. Well now, Joseph is upset and so he says no, no, no Manasseh is the firstborn, and he reaches out and tries to take Jacob’s [sic] hand and tries to take his right hand and put it on the head of Manasseh and his left hand on Ephraim, and the old man has got enough strength to resist the prime minister of Egypt. He says, uh-uh, I know my son, I know. He knows what he is doing. So do I know. He said he shall become a people and he also shall be great, however his younger brother shall be greater than he and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.

You see that’s why the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews puts this in his 11th chapter. This is a great act of faith on the part of Jacob. He has heard the voice of God speaking in his heart. He has acted on the basis of it. He has even rejected the counsel of the prime minister of Egypt, a godly man himself, and he is sticking to his guns. He has got himself now anchored in the will of God. Jacob has finally become Israel and he is not going to move from that. So he finishes and he has a word for Joseph at the end. He says Joseph, in the 21st verse, I am about to die but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. I am going but God’s going to be with you. Happy is the believer who looks beyond men onto the Lord God.

This is why this was such a great act of faith. Jacob recognized that his blessings have come from this God, the God before whom his fathers walked, the God who had fed him all of his life, the angel who had redeemed him from all evil. He recognizes grace, he sees the angel as his kinsman redeemer, the one who has redeemed me from all evils. He has a new outlook. He sees his redeemer in clear vision and he worships as he stands by the side of the bed O’ the perseverance of God who

persevered with this crooked supplanter and finally makes him truly Israel, the prince or the fighter with God.

And of course, this last picture of Jacob with crossed hands, blessing one, the one that surprisingly is not the firstborn, gives us a vivid picture of the fact that there is no blessing that comes to us apart from the grace of God through the cross of Jesus Christ. So he crosses his hands in token of the fact that it is by the cross that nature is rejected and that grace comes to those who bow before the Lord Jesus Christ, acknowledge their sin, and receive as a free gift forgiveness, a righteous standing before the Lord God that is not legal fiction but is biblical divine truth.

If you are here in this audience and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we remind you of your sin and of the fact that the Son of God has died for sinners and that you may come as the Holy Spirit brings conviction to him and receive as a gift through the cross the blessings of firstborn sons, for that’s what the Bible says that we are that’s we share in the inheritance of the firstborn son of God. May God bring you to faith and Christ and the possession of everlasting life! When your deathbed comes, you will face it in the faith that glorifies God.

Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father we are so thankful to Thee for these wonderful pictures that are given to us from the word of God and we confess that is a picture that shall never leave us, the old man blessing those two boys with crossed hands, reminding us that nature because of sin does not inherit the blessings of God.

It is by the grace of God that we enter into any of the blessings of our great triune God. O God, speak to the hearts of all present, show them their need. Bring them to Christ. May they enjoy that relationship of righteousness through free grace. May God’s great mercy and grace go with us. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.