

Genesis 48 — God is Faithful

December 11, 2016

Welcome to CrossWinds. It is good to gather for worship in this Christmas season. As a church, on both campuses, we are studying through the book of Genesis. Last week we took a week off from our Genesis study to share the CrossWinds mission statement and our vision for the next five years. I also challenged each of us to get involved to move it forward. Achieving our vision of a Spencer facility and another campus will involve all of us prayerfully wrestling with what God is calling us to give or do to make it possible.

This morning we are back in Genesis. Before we jump in, let me give you an overview of what is happening for the rest of December and into the new year because things are a little funky. Next Sunday, we will be in Genesis chapter 49. That is normal. The following Saturday night, which is Christmas Eve, we are having our special Christmas Eve service at the Sami Center at 7 p.m. The next morning is Sunday, which is Christmas Day. We are not gathering for corporate worship that morning. Pastor Jordan and I decided to do a special Christmas message for you via video for Christmas morning. It isn't long. It is approximately 10 minutes. If all goes according to plan, we will have DVDs available next Sunday. We expect most of you will watch the message via our web site and you will see it promoted on Facebook. Our hope is to take advantage of this unique opportunity where Christmas day falls on a Sunday and reach more people at home through the Internet with the message of Christmas than we would be able to reach on Christmas Day with a regular service.

You can help us reach more people for Christ this Christmas by taking a few minutes for home worship on Christmas day and watching our 10-minute Christmas message on the Internet then sharing the link on Facebook or your favorite social media.

The following Sunday is January 1. I think we will call that hangover Sunday. Something tells me the early service won't be packed. The coffee bar will be double brewing the coffee that morning and we are giving out complementary Alka Seltzer and No-Doz in the welcome packets.

We are also doing something a little different on that Sunday too. I will do a message on the importance and the power of the Word of God in our lives. On January 8 we will go back to Genesis and finish our last message in that book. On January 15 we begin our study of 1 Timothy. It will be a busy few weeks.

This morning, we are in Genesis. Two weeks ago we were in Genesis 47, which was an overview of what happened to Egypt and to the sons of Jacob for the 17 years after Jacob's family came to Egypt to survive the famine with Joseph.

In summary, things were rough for Egypt during the famine. The economy was destroyed. There was no money. Joseph managed the crisis well and everyone survived. He wisely sold the grain and he fostered self-respect by creating an economy in Egypt when there wasn't an economy. When it came to the sons of Jacob that were living next to Egypt in Goshen, instead of struggling in the famine, they did well for those years and for the decade that followed. They made good money, bought land, built houses, owned motorhomes, cars, jet skis

and all the fun toys of adult life. The entire family thought moving to Egypt was the best decision of their lives. They didn't know why they hadn't come earlier. Everyone was content in Egypt, except Jacob, the patriarch.

Genesis 47 closed with Jacob calling Joseph to him and making Joseph give him a solemn promise. He wanted Joseph to remember that while things were going well in Egypt, Egypt was not their home. Egypt was not where they would stay. God promised them the land of Canaan. One day God would take them there. Jacob made Joseph promise that when Jacob died, Joseph would bury him in the family tomb in Canaan, not in Egypt because that is where Jacob and his descendants belonged.

Today, as we pick up the story, it is a few weeks or a few months later. In Genesis 47, Jacob was doing the prearrangement work for his funeral. In Genesis 48, he is close to death and has one foot the casket. When you have someone like Jacob, who has walked with God for years and he is ready to die, you know his final words will be important words. Everyone wanted to listen. Let's see what he had to say.

After this, Joseph was told, "Behold, your father is ill." So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And it was told to Jacob, "Your son Joseph has come to you." Then Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed. And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.'" Genesis 48:1-4 (ESV)

The family knew this day was coming but nobody was prepared for it when it happened. Joseph received the phone call he dreaded. "Your father is dying. If you hurry, you can speak to him before he passes." Can you imagine the feelings

running through Joseph? He grabbed his sons and put them in the back seat of his high performance Italian chariot and flew out of town. When Joseph arrived at his father's bedside, his father summoned whatever strength he had left to sit up in bed and say his final words. I picture Joseph and his sons leaning into Jacob to hear his barely audible voice.

What would Jacob say in these final final moments? What did he want to make sure everyone knew? He gave his testimony. He talked about how God reached into his life. God grabbed him, made promises to him and changed him. He said it all began at Luz. That may throw you off. So far we haven't seen Luz used in Genesis. Luz was simply a nickname for Bethel. It was in Bethel when Jacob was a younger man and running for fear of his life. He stole his brother's birthright and blessing from their aging father. Esau, his older brother, was intent on murdering him. Jacob ran for his life to Uncle Laban. It was at this low point, when he was scared to death and running for his life God appeared to him at Bethel in a vision known as Jacob's ladder. He saw the angels of God ascending and descending from heaven on a stone staircase and God spoke to him. That was Jacob's come-to-Jesus moment. That was when Jacob was born again.

In that vision God promised him three things. First, he promised to give him many descendants. Second, he promised to give him the land of Canaan. Third, he promised to never leave him no matter what twists and turns lay ahead of him in the roller coaster of life. Let's read these promises as they were given in Genesis 28.

And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to

you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”
Genesis 28:13–15 (ESV)

Twenty years later, when Jacob returned to the Promised Land, God appeared to him again in that same spot and reaffirmed these promises.

God had been faithful. In God’s strange providence, Jacob wanted one wife but ended up with four. God promised to give him many descendants. Through those four wives a dozen children were born. By the time Jacob’s family went to Egypt they had grown to more than 100 in number. In the next 17 years since they arrived in Egypt, they had probably grown to more than 150 or 175 in number. That is a lot of birthday cards and Christmas cards for Grandpa Jacob to remember!

God was faithful to Jacob. He kept his promise of many descendants but God hadn’t yet kept his promise of giving the land of Canaan to Jacob and his offspring. If anything, it felt like they took a step backwards because they left the land due to famine and now were happily settled in Egypt.

Here is Jacob’s message to Joseph and to us. God will be faithful. It may look like he had forgotten to keep his promises. It may look like his promises were nothing more than words on a page or Sunday School cliches you learned when you were a child, but God is faithful. He will keep his promises even if you see little or no progress toward them in your life. God is always faithful to his word.

This is something each of us needs to keep in mind when the hard times in life hit us. We need to remember this when it feels like God is not answering our prayers or we wonder if he even exists or cares. God is faithful. He will keep those promises.

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. And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. As for me, when I came from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).” When Israel 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, that 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. Genesis 48:5–12 (ESV)

Now something amazing happens. On his deathbed Jacob decided to adopt Joseph’s two sons into the original 12 tribes of Israel. He said they would be like Reuben and Simeon. Reuben and Simeon were Jacob’s first-born and second-born sons through Leah, the wife he never wanted. They had not proven to be the best kids. Reuben committed incest and slept with Bilhah, one of his father’s wives. Simeon was the mass murderer who killed all the men in the city of Shechem after the prince raped his sister. Simeon had a problem with overreaction. 1 Chronicles 5:1-2 comments on this moment. It says Jacob adopted Ephraim and Manasseh and he gave Ephraim and Manasseh the place of prominence in the family that was originally held by Reuben and Simeon as the first and second born. Why did Jacob do this? One reason is because Reuben and Simeon disqualified themselves for family leadership by their

actions. Another reason is this allowed more children of Rachel to be part of the inheritance. This is why Jacob started talking about why he was so heartbroken when Rachel died in childbirth at Bethlehem. He was hoping to have more children through her. Adopting Joseph's children helped fill the gap from Rachel in the new nation because of her unexpected death.

Jacob was old. He had nasty cataracts and couldn't see a thing. Dr. Fox wasn't around to help with those cataracts so everything was blurry. Jacob realized more than just Joseph is with him in the room so he asked who was there. He wanted to make sure he knew who was in the room. He remembered how he cheated his own father out of the birthright and the blessing when his father Isaac was old and couldn't see. Jacob wanted to make sure the same thing didn't happen to him.

When he realizes he had Ephraim and Manasseh right in front of him, he called them over, cried over them and gave them the family blessing. I am sure this moment was powerful for these young men. At this time, they were about 20. This was their dying grandfather speaking a blessing into them that would ring in their ears for the rest of their lives.

I love this line. "I never expected to see your face and behold, God has let me see your offspring." For 20 years Jacob was convinced Joseph was dead. He was convinced all hope was gone. God had a good plan Jacob did not understand for those 20 years. God was going to figuratively bring Joseph back from the dead. Not only was Joseph alive and ruling in Egypt but now Jacob could even enjoy Joseph's grandsons. He was so proud of his grandsons

because they were such godly men that Jacob had adopted them into his family and given them leadership over his family.

Here is that same theme. God was faithful. When Jacob thought his life was over because he lost Joseph, and he never imagined this day. Jacob never imagined seeing Joseph again and he never envisioned having such good and godly grandkids through Joseph to which he could give leadership over his family.

The message we need to remember is that just as God was faithful to Jacob and Jacob wanted his children to know God would be faithful to them, God will be faithful to you and me. Even when it looks like no hope is left, in ways we never expected and in ways we couldn't even imagine, God pulls a rabbit out of the hat and cares for us and provides for our needs in ways we never imagine. Has anyone here ever seen that in life?

Incidentally, Jacob was not the only one trusting in the faithfulness of God. Ephraim and Manasseh were godly kids who were also taking a step of faith by allowing themselves to be adopted into Jacob's family tree. When they are adopted into Jacob's family they were pulling themselves away from ruling over Egypt in their father's place. They turned their back on the pleasures of Egypt to become part of Jacob's family in faith that God would take care of them and all of God's promises would prove true.

And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him. And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands (for Manasseh was the firstborn). 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 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, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.” Genesis 48:13–16 (ESV)

Once Jacob adopted them into his family, he wanted to bless them. He had Ephraim and Manasseh come in front of him. In that culture, the right hand was the hand of blessing reserved for the firstborn. Joseph put his kids in the right position with Manasseh, the oldest, in front of Jacob’s right hand for his blessing but dying Jacob crosses his hands. Why did he do that? We will learn more on that in a moment.

Here is where it gets interesting. Jacob called God the one before whom Abraham and Isaac walked and the God who redeemed him from all evil. The word for evil is a special word. It encompasses all forms of evil. It is not just moral evil that someone chooses to do against you but it also refers to situational evil. That is bad stuff that happens to us in life because we live in a fallen world. That is your tire going flat, your car batteries going dead, your computer crashing when you are typing your final exam or that painful infection in your toe. Jacob says all of the bad things that happened to him, whether it was moral or situational evil, were redeemed by God and used by God for a good purpose. That means God took the evil in his life, such as Laban cheating him out of his wages or Laban putting the wrong woman in the bridal suite on his wedding night and while that evil was not good, God did something good with it. God also took the situational evil, like the unexpected death of Rachel in childbirth and the life of slavery Joseph suffered and God redeemed all this evil and used it for a good purpose. It is not that evil things are good things. It is that moral or situational evil cannot

trump God's good purposes in our lives. He rolls all of that evil into his plan and uses it for a good purpose.

The word in Hebrew for redeem presupposes that something evil has happened but God transcended it by a greater act of good. This is what Jacob was saying. God takes the tragic events that happen in the lives of his children and God redeems them and he uses those evil things for good purposes. None of Jacob's pain was wasted. None of his sorrow was fruitless.

The same is true for you and me. When hard times come our way either because of our own sin or the sin someone has done against us, don't give up hope. God loves you. He will still accomplish his plan for you. If God allows you to live to a ripe old age like Jacob you will have the vantage point to look back and see how what others meant for evil, God twisted and used for good. God is faithful to his people.

God was faithful to Jacob throughout his life. Now Jacob asked in faith that God would be faithful to Ephraim and Manasseh and bless them. In faith he asked God that they would carry on Jacob's name and grow into a great multitude that would fill the land. Interestingly, the actual Hebrew says a great multitude of fish. The picture is of a massive school of fish working together as one. Isn't that a great picture? That is what Jacob was praying in faith would happen to Joseph's boys. God was always faithful in his past. God will continue to be faithful to these boys when he was gone in the future.

God was faithful in the past. In faith we can trust him in the future.

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, and 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. Genesis 48:17–20 (ESV)

What happens is Joseph thought his dad was getting kooky in his old age. "Dad's hands are crossed. He is old. He is going to give the greater blessing to the wrong kid by mistake." The Hebrew says Joseph literally took his father's hands, grabbed them and tried to forcibly switch them. He thought his dad was kooky. Jacob refused. Why did Jacob refuse? Why did he want the younger to be more blessed than the older.

Jacob had come to realize, that is the way God usually works. Perhaps God had supernaturally told Jacob this is the way God would work for Ephraim in the future. Many of us will be encouraged to know that most of the time God works through unexpected people. The second born, not the firstborn. The firstborn was typically given prominence. It began with Cain who was rejected but Abel, the second-born, was accepted. God choose Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over Reuben, Perez over Zerah and Ephraim over Manasseh.

Was God faithful to this blessing? Yes. In the census taken in the second year after the Exodus, the male population of Ephraim was 20 percent more than that of Manasseh (Number 1:233, 35). At one time the entire northern kingdom of Israel was simply called Ephraim because there were so many from that one tribe that lived there. How does that compare to the tribes of Reuben and Simeon? Forty years after the Exodus those two tribes went down by 40,000

people, while the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh had grown by 12,000. God was faithful. He made Manasseh and Ephraim exceedingly fruitful and he blessed them over Reuben and Simeon.

Jacob understood the way God usually worked and that God would be faithful to his promise.

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.” Genesis 48:21–22 (ESV)

Jacob said again that God is faithful. He would bring them out of the land of Egypt. He gave a particular piece of land to Joseph and his descendants in the Promised Land. We don’t know what battle this was where Jacob won so he owned the deed to a mountain slope but how he acquired the land isn’t important. That he had the land and gave it to Joseph is important. In Egypt, Joseph owned almost any land he wanted. When Jacob gave Joseph this mountain slope in the Promised Land it was a way of helping remind him Egypt wasn’t his final home.

This is like giving your children U.S. Savings Bonds at Christmas. When they open them, there is nothing thrilling about them because you can’t spend them. Years later, when you need them, you realize their importance.

God would be faithful to his word and some day in the future the descendants of Joseph would need this land and realize the importance of having it. Think of how that cemented in the mind of Joseph and his descendants that Canaan was their home.

Jacob's message to us today is that he learned God was faithful to him over his life. Even all the moral evil or situational evil done to him did not thwart God's good plans. As God was faithful to Jacob over his life, he was confident God would be faithful to his children, grandchildren and all the way down to us in our lives today. When it seems God is silent and when it feels like life is out of control, God is still in control and we can trust his good plan.

Perhaps the greatest example of God's faithfulness and God's ability to use even the worst moral and situational evil as part of his good plans is the example of his own son, Jesus. God the Father was incredibly faithful to his own son. Even when situations looked purposeless or hopeless as the Father turned his back on his son and innocent Jesus died at the hands of the Romans and the Jews, God the Father had a good plan. God took the great evil of the crucifixion of Christ and incorporated it into his plan to accomplish great good, defeat of Satan, sin and death and the saving of our lives. If God was faithful to Jacob over his life and he even redeemed the evil done for him and used it for good, if God was faithful to Jesus over his life and he redeemed the evil done to Jesus and used it for great good, we can rest assured that as we walk with God and face time of unexpected moral or situational evil in our lives, God is faithful. He will redeem it and use it for great good in our lives as well. If we live long enough to look back, we can get a glimpse into his good plan.



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