

The Triumph of Grace – Part 1 (Genesis 48:1-22 August 17, 2008)



For good reason Hebrews 11 is known as the hall of faith. It recounts the great moments of faith from the Old Testament.

Listen to a few of these great moments.

By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did.

By faith Enoch was commended as one who pleased God and was taken from this life.

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice.

Simply stunning moments of faith in the lives of great men.

But then we come to verse 21:

By faith **Jacob!** ...

When I read through Hebrews 11 – and come to verse 21 – two things strike me.

First, I am struck by the fact that Jacob even made it into the hall of faith.

For most of his life – Jacob is a man I struggle to warm to.

He is a deceiver who manipulates his brother into forfeiting his birthright.

He fools his blind aged father into giving him the blessing.

The Lord appears to him and promises to be with him and to watch over him wherever he goes – and in the face of such grace, Jacob says – OK **if** you will give me what I really want – material blessing – **then** you will be my God.

He looks for satisfaction in a woman rather than in God.

He ends up with two wives and two concubine wives – and his favouritism among the wives tears his family apart.

When his brother Esau meets him and forgives him – Jacob lies to his face.

He vows to take his family back to Bethel but is lured by the bright lights of Shechem where he fails to lead them and the result is his daughter is raped and his sons massacre a city.

His favouritism towards Joseph inflames his other sons to plot to kill their brother and finally to sell him into slavery. He then spends decades moping.

He shifts his favouritism to Benjamin – and says to his boys – I only have one real son left and that is Benjamin – I won't risk him to save Simeon.

Jacob is someone who has many all too human flaws. His is not a name that readily springs to mind when you think of the great men of faith.

He is one of the dominant characters in the book of Genesis. He enters the book in chapter 25 and it is only in the last chapter of the book – Genesis 50 that he is buried.

And for most of this time he comes across as a self-absorbed man blind to his own failings – yet here he is in the *Hall of Faith*.

But what is equally stunning is what the author of Hebrews chooses as **the** great act of faith in the life of Jacob.

As you think about his long and varied life – what would you think would have been the spiritual high point of his life?

Perhaps it was desiring the birthright so much that he would extort it from his brother Esau.

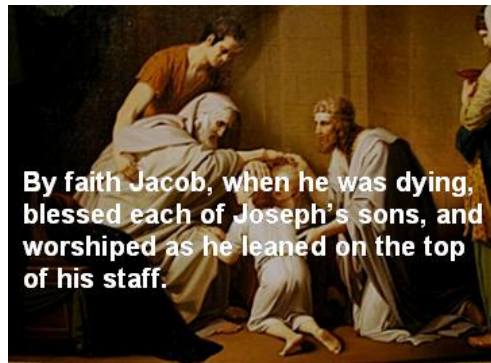
Perhaps it was desiring the blessing so much that he would deceive his father into blessing him over Esau.

The passage that I probably would have chosen as the spiritual high point was when he was fleeing from Laban and at Peniel he wrestled with God all night and refused to let go – despite a wrenched hip – until God blessed him.

Some might have chosen his deathbed choice to bless Judah and to have faith that the Messiah would come from his descendants.

Others might look at his insistence that he be buried in the Promised Land as a sign of his faith in the promises of God.

But interestingly enough – the inspired writer of the Hebrews – when choosing to highlight the faith of Jacob – selects none of these events. The event he chooses is certainly not a kill your beloved son on Mount Moriah type of moment.



Listen to what he chose – Hebrews 11:21:

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

At first I thought – is that it? – is that the greatest act of faith in the life of this Patriarch?

But then I read through Genesis 48 – over and over – and I realised that it *is* indeed the high point of faith in the life of Jacob.

Jacob is the embodiment of a man who fought against the grace of God all his life.

He felt he deserved the blessing and the birthright. He had earned it.

He spurned the grace of God at Bethel when the Lord freely offered his love by asking for material blessing.

He felt that he had earned Rachel and earned wealth from Laban.

He failed to grasp the grace of Esau forgiving him and lied to his brother.

As well, what we find are many instances where Jacob is angry with the Lord at the course his life takes. It is true that Jacob did not have a saloon passage through life. He lived a tough life.

He was raised by a father who preferred his strong outdoors brother.

He fought for what he saw as his right – the blessing – and had to flee, leaving behind his beloved mother – the one he was closest to in this world. He never saw her again.

He was forced to work 20 years for his uncle, Laban, who exploited him and manipulated him and stole from him and tricked him into marrying a woman he didn't love. Then the woman he did love died very young during childbirth.

His sons turned out to be incestuous, immoral, murderous men – all except his favourite – Joseph. But then word came that Joseph had been torn to shreds by a wild animal – sending him into decades of depression.

After twenty-two years of mourning he finds out that this pain was actually caused by his sons who lied repeatedly to his face.

And as an old man of one hundred and thirty he was uprooted from his home and taken to live out his days in a foreign land.

We can understand why in Genesis 42:36 he complains – everything is against me – and in Genesis 47:9 he describes his life to Pharaoh with these words – my years have been few and difficult.

Yes there have been bright sparks in the life of Jacob. He did not despise the birthright. He wrestled with God at Peniel. But when the disasters of life struck – his faith waned.

But why chapter 48 is chosen as a high point of faith is that at the end of his life, Jacob finally realises the grace of God that has embodied him throughout his life.

After his long and difficult life – he comes to understand the true glory of grace. He embraces it – and now he longs for his sons and grandsons to embrace it.

There are some here this morning who can look back on their lives – and they would say with Jacob – my years have been difficult. Trials that have tested your faith to the point of breaking. Perhaps there has been anger toward God. Disappointment at your own sin. Regrets over wasted opportunities.

There are some here this morning who will in the course of time go through the dark valley of trial.

Genesis 48 is for you. Faith triumphs in the end.

To show you the point Jacob had come to – look with me at Genesis 48:15 where he says this:

God has been my shepherd all my life to this day.

Once he cried – everything is against me. Now he says – even in the darkest of trials – the Lord – my faithful shepherd was with me through every difficult moment.

What is the difference? The answer is simple. He came to truly understand the grace of God that suffuses his life.

This is indeed a great passage and a great show of faith. Look with me at this passage – Genesis 48:1-2:

Some time later Joseph was told, "Your father is ill." So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim along with him. When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to you," Israel rallied his strength and sat up on the bed.

Jacob has reached the end of his life. He is one hundred and forty-seven years old and nearing death.

Joseph comes with his two sons – Manasseh and Ephraim. But what soon becomes clear is that Joseph and Jacob have very different motivations and expectations of this deathbed blessing.

Remember what we have seen earlier in Genesis regarding deathbed blessings and the rights of the firstborn.

There were two aspects to the rights of the firstborn – birthright and blessing. They are related and shouldn't be too sharply divided.

But in general terms, the birthright came as a result of being the first born son. The firstborn usually received a double portion of the inheritance and was leader over the family.

The blessing was usually bestowed on the deathbed and it affirmed the rights of the firstborn. It was the formal passing over of the rights of the firstborn and leadership of the family.

But within the descendants of Abraham – there was another aspect to these rights. The blessing also indicated the line which would ultimately lead to Messiah.

Under normal circumstances – the birthright and the blessing and the seed line would go to the oldest son.

But the father could designate otherwise – or a son could renounce his rights.

Here we find that Jacob is about to die and the great question is – where will the rights of the firstborn go?

We have already seen that Reuben – the oldest son – forfeited his rights as firstborn, when he slept with his father's concubine.

Simeon and Levi – the next oldest – they forfeited their rights because they had destroyed a town in anger over the rape of their sister. For that Jacob decided that they were not suitable to lead the family.

Remember back in Genesis 37 – it had seemed that Joseph was marked out as the one Jacob would bestow all the rights of the firstborn.

He was placed over his brothers. He was given the royal robe.

But then Joseph disappeared – and Judah assumed leadership of the family.

As this passage begins, it seems that Joseph has assumed that all the rights of the firstborn will come to him and then on to his oldest son Manasseh. So he has brought his boys – to receive the blessing – and for Manasseh to be confirmed as the heir and seed line.

This is not just bringing his boys to say goodbye. These are men in their late teens – early twenties – and they are coming to receive the family blessing.

But Jacob has other ideas. He wants to convey a truth it has taken him all his life to fully grasp.

What he does in chapters 48 and 49 – is to divide the rights of the firstborn.

To Joseph and his sons – they would take the immediate leadership of the family and would receive the double inheritance.

Joseph is but one son – yet his two sons would take equal shares – a double inheritance in the family.

However, the seed line – the kingly line – the line leading to Messiah would pass through another son – Judah. We find this in Genesis 49 which we will look at next week.

Listen to how 1 Chronicles 5:1-2 sums up this division of the rights:

The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (he was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father's marriage bed, his rights as firstborn were given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel; so he could not be listed in the genealogical record in accordance with his birthright, and though Judah was the strongest of his brothers and a ruler came from him, the rights of the firstborn belonged to Joseph).

Joseph gets the family leadership – the double portion that belongs to the firstborn – yet the seed line leading to Messiah is passed through Judah.

Why did Jacob do this?

Because at the end of his life – Jacob came to realise what was truly important for his sons and grandsons.

Once all Jacob desired was the birthright and the blessing – he would manipulate, lie and deceive. He would leave the land. He would do whatever it took.

Now, he realised that what was truly important was the grace of God that saves sinners like him. And he wanted to make sure that his sons and grandsons understood faith and the glory of grace.

The aspect of the blessing that was truly important was not the double blessing, the leadership of the family, and in a sense not even where the seed line went – it was what the seed line pointed to.

If you have faith in the promise of God – then you will be saved.

Many will come from the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – they will experience many joys of this life – but they will be lost eternally.

Jacob wants his sons to know the real blessing – salvation through faith.

That should be us. Throughout our life – we often get caught up and distracted. Working, paying the mortgage, getting the kids to basketball and ballet. Providing a good home and education.

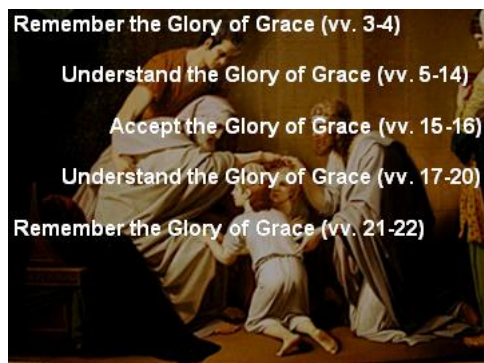
But talk to any older saint – as the day of your departure draws near there is only *one* thing that really matters.

Wills, your financial affairs – all of these are *very* secondary. When the breath of eternity is on your neck – then you realise what really matters is this – are your family saved?

Will you see your children and grandchildren – your neighbours – your closest friends in eternity.

Jacob has reached this point. And he is determined to make sure that Joseph and Manasseh and Ephraim and you and I understand the glory of grace and the salvation it brings.

We can outline Jacob's heart in this chapter like this:



Remember the Glory of Grace (vv. 3-4)

Understand the Glory of Grace (vv. 5-14)

Accept the Glory of Grace (vv. 15-16)

Understand the Glory of Grace (vv. 17-20)

Remember the Glory of Grace (vv. 21-22)

First, we have to: *Remember the Glory of Grace.*

Look at verses 3-4:

Jacob said to Joseph, “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and said to me, ‘I am going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.’”

Jacob has finally come to see his whole life as being immersed in the grace of God.

He thinks back to the time when he was a young man – forced to leave the Promised Land – and God Almighty appeared to him at Luz – and then many years later in the same spot when God spoke to him again..

There in Luz, the Lord reminded him of the covenant – the gracious gift of salvation that comes to the children of Abraham through faith.

And now Jacob is making sure that his family knew that this promise was for all the true descendants of Abraham.

Manasseh and Ephraim probably looked Egyptian – in their dress and hair styles. Their father was the most powerful politician in Egypt. Their mother was an Egyptian princess – daughter of an Egyptian priest. They spoke Egyptian – they were raised in an Egyptian culture.

But – they had to know that they were **not** Egyptian. They were sons of Abraham. They had to know the promise made to Abraham through which they could be saved. Their eternal destiny depended on it.

Their salvation is the emphasis. You can see this if you compare Genesis 28 and 35 – the times the Lord appeared to Jacob at Luz – with what he says here. It is the *differences* that are significant.

In Genesis 35 – there is one crucial aspect of the promise that Jacob does not mention – *Kings will come from your body.*

That is not mentioned here – because – we find that the kingly line – the sceptre of rulership – actually passes through Judah. As we will see next time – this is done to emphasise the glory of grace.

As well – in Genesis 35 – the emphasis is on the descendants coming into the land. Here the emphasis is on the land as an **everlasting possession**. This harks back to Genesis 17 – where we saw that the point was that the land looked forward to eternity – heaven is the real everlasting possession.

Jacob is dying. He is focussing on the spiritual side of the covenant. God's grace to save sinners. These boys **had** to understand saving grace – or they would not inherit their eternal possession – heaven.

It took Jacob many years to grasp the glory of grace. He knew full well that he was not heading to heaven because of his works. He had sinned and failed and lived a life that was often not holy. He did not deserve heaven.

But he came to realise that no one deserves heaven and that the grace of God is sufficient for even the chief of sinners.

John Newton – came to understand this.

If you visit the village of Olney in England – you will find a grave stone that has this chiselled on it:

John Newton, Clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long laboured to destroy.

Newton preached on grace – wrote the hymn *Amazing Grace* – and determined to see others share that grace.

And here is why Newton and Jacob were so immersed in grace. They had lives in which they messed up so badly – their sin was so prominent – that the grace of God was their only hope.

They came to love and embrace grace.

And when you read Genesis 48 – there is a sense in which Jacob wants his sons and grandsons to know that at the end – Tis grace hath brought him safe thus far and grace will lead him home.

A man like Joseph has such a sterling life – perhaps his sons Manasseh and Ephraim might think – what we need to do is be godly like Dad.

Perhaps they look at grandpa and see him as a black sheep in the line of grace.

Jacob says – while I am the chief of sinners – grace even extends to me.

Manasseh and Ephraim need to know – what they need is grace.

I want to say something to the young men and women of this church.

There comes a time when you realise that mum and dad aren't perfect. They sin. They have areas of hypocrisy. And you might be tempted to think – why should I be a Christian if that is what Christianity looks like?

And the answer is that mum and dad aren't perfect – but neither are you – and we *all* need grace. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

Jacob knows this. He knows that it is grace and grace alone that saves. So in verses 5-14 – He longs for us to *Understand the Glory of Grace*.

Basically he says this. I am going to adopt Manasseh and Ephraim as my sons. They will rank equally with the other eleven sons.

So the one son Joseph – receives a double blessing – by becoming two tribes.

He says – Rachel died young – to my sorrow – I could have no more sons by her – so I take your sons to be mine as if they came from her.

Then comes a formal adoption ceremony. Verses 8-14 describe this ceremony.

The formal question – who are these? It is like at a wedding – who gives this woman to marry this man? It is a legal ceremony.

The hands on the head to bless them – he formally adopts them.

But, the adoption takes a turn far from what Joseph expected.

In verse 1 – Joseph is said to bring – *Manasseh* – the older – and *Ephraim* – the younger – to Jacob.

But in verse 5 – Jacob says – ***Ephraim*** and *Manasseh* – will be mine – he names the younger son first.

This is no slip of the tongue from an old man.

In verses 12 – 14 we find Joseph lining up the sons – Manasseh on his left – so he will be on Jacob's right and Ephraim on his right – under Jacob's left hand.

He positions Manasseh under Jacob's right hand – the hand of power. The leadership of the family should pass to Manasseh.

But at the last moment – Jacob switches his hands – his right hand is upon Ephraim – even though Manasseh was firstborn.

Jacob knew exactly what he was doing.

Finally, at the end of his life Jacob understands grace. Grace is not something deserved, earned, merited.

The world says – it is the rich, the powerful, the good looking, the well connected, the moral, the good – these are the ones who deserve blessing.

The world says – the blessing should pass through Manasseh – the older son.

But Genesis is at pains again and again to make it very clear that grace does *not* flow through worldly channels.

Every time – the blessing passes through the less likely channel.

Through Seth – not Cain.

Through Abraham not through his older brother Haran.

Through Isaac not Ishmael.

Through Jacob not Esau.

Through Judah not Rueben or Joseph.

Through Perez not Zerah.

We see it in other places. Through the choice of old, infertile Sarah as the mother of the nation over the younger, fertile Hagar

We see it when it is the unattractive, unloved Leah whose son becomes the seed line not the attractive, loved Rachel.

Jacob of all people should have understood grace over merit. Esau was firstborn. Esau was the athletic outdoors brother. Esau was loved by Isaac.

But God had said – the older will serve the younger – Jacob will receive the blessing.

But Jacob failed to grasp grace – he saw it as his right – he fought for it – he earned it.

But finally – grace triumphs. At last he understands that it is a gift of God.

If anyone – the best of men – to the most depraved reprobates – if anyone is going to get to heaven – it will not be by works – it can only be through grace.

And because this is so counterintuitive – so difficult to grasp – yet so crucial – much of the Genesis and indeed much of the Bible deals with grace. Many of Jesus' parables deal with grace – the Publican and the Pharisee. The gracious farmer. The prodigal son.

And grace is at the root of the epistles.

Phillip Yancey defines grace like this:

Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more. ... and grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less.¹

¹ Phillip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997) p. 70.

We saw it in Adam and Noah.

We saw it vividly portrayed in the life of Abraham. God called this man – the moon-worshipping, half-hearted pagan – and filled him with grace.

We saw it very starkly in the life of Lot. Move near Sodom, move into Sodom, become a leader in Sodom, offer daughters to the mob, sleep with daughters – Lot. Yet, by faith – he was a righteous man.

We saw it in Judah – Befriend a Canaanite, marry a Canaanite, raise wicked sons, refuse to honour your daughter-in-law, sleep with a woman you think is a prostitute – Judah.

And now we see it in the life of Jacob.

By giving the greater blessing to the younger son – he is making a point – grace is not merited or earned.

This is so hard to learn. If we read our Bibles, give money, share the gospel – something inside us thinks we deserve some extra blessing.

If we lose our temper, watch some porn, slack off at work – something inside us thinks we deserve something bad to happen.

Our natural default is merit and punishment.

But, our salvation depends on us trusting in His grace and His grace *alone*. None of us can merit the blessing of God – it is given to those who realise they can never merit it and come asking for this gift.

This leads us to the central section of this chapter – the part that is highlighted by the structure – *Accept the Glory of Grace*.

Look at verses 15 and 16:

Then he blessed Joseph and said, “May 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 delivered me from all harm—may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth.”

This is a remarkable blessing.

The God of my fathers who has been my shepherd all my life to this day.

Jacob was a shepherd. It is what he has done all his life. He understands this concept of shepherd and sheep.

Here for the first time in the Bible – God is described as a shepherd and we are described as sheep.

Saying he is a sheep is no compliment toward him or towards us – this is reality.

Sheep are known proverbially as weak and stupid animals.

They need protection, guidance and care.

They follow the flock – but if they lose concentration – they become lost easily and simply cannot find their way back.

Shepherds have to come looking for them. But don't think that sheep are grateful to be found.

Rarely do lost sheep come running to the shepherd. Usually they panic and try and get away.

Even when you catch them they struggle on – so the shepherd has to grab the sheep, tie its forelegs together, ties its hind legs together, then put the struggling bleating animal over his shoulder and take it home.

That is how Jacob sees himself. A sheep who struggled against grace – but God prevailed and saved him despite himself.

All his life – he fought against the grace of God. He blamed God for the tragedies, the struggles, the dark times.

Now he says – I know that the Lord – the Great Shepherd – was with me.

The struggles were the Lord bringing me back. The pain was for my good. My life may not have gone the way I wanted – but now I can say – the Lord Almighty was shaping my life to work things for good.

The trials were simply the Shepherd casting me down, tying me and dragging me struggling to the safety of home.

But even more remarkable is this statement where he speaks of – the Angel who has delivered me from all harm – or literally – *the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil*.

Redeem is the word – *goel* – which speaks of a kinsman redeemer. It is the word used of Boaz redeeming Ruth.

When someone owes a debt they simply cannot pay – a relative can pay the redemption price and redeem them.

Here he says – I owed a debt I could not pay – I was a sinner and unable to meet the standard – I was lost and without hope – and the Angel redeemed me.

He is thinking of the Angel of the Lord he wrestled with all night. He came to realise it was God he was struggling with – and he sought a blessing.

While we cannot be certain – I believe that it is here Jacob shows an inspired depth of understanding. He knew that by grace – God would send Messiah – a Saviour.

But here he seems to understand that this Messiah is the Angel – God Himself – and His salvation depends on Messiah redeeming him – paying the debt he could not pay.

As Christians – we know what this means – Jesus died in our place – His death pays the penalty for our sin – He redeems us and saves us from evil.

How much of this Jacob knew is uncertain – but he knows his need of redemption and he knows the One who will redeem him.

The Shepherd – the Redeemer – these are two wonderful themes of grace.

Shepherds don't care for sheep and save them because they deserve it.

Redeemers do not ransom kinsmen because they deserve it.

These are acts of sheer grace. That is now how Jacob sees his life. It is how every one of us should see our lives.

But more than that – Jacob longs for these boys – and indeed all the nation to know the glory of grace.

May God bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac. May they know the joy of being part of the people of God.

That is my prayer for my children. That is my prayer for each of you. May His grace be in our souls.

Then the opening themes are repeated – again – *we have to understand the Glory of Grace vv. 17-20.*

Joseph is a great man – probably one of the greatest men in history.

A man of integrity. A man of faith. A man who saved his nation. A man whose life typifies much of the life of Christ.

But at this stage of his life – Joseph still has a lesson to learn about the glory of grace.

Manasseh was the firstborn – it seems right that the greater blessing should flow to him. So Joseph becomes displeased and does something unheard of he interrupts his father and attempts to move his father's hands.

Jacob says – "I know, my son, I know."

I know what I am doing this is no mistake.

Walter Brueggemann, in his commentary on this passage says this:

Jacob refuses. He refuses because this is the God who chooses midwives of Israel against the claims of the empire (Exod. 1:15-22). He refuses because this God walks with David in the face of Saul (I Sam. 16:1-13), in the face of Goliath (I Sam. 17:41-54), and even in the face of David's brothers (I Sam. 17:28). Jacob refuses because at the last, this God accompanies the crucified One (Acts 2:32) who leads the band of the lame, blind, poor, and lepers (Luke 7:22). That band includes all those excluded by the claims of primogeniture, merit, and reason. And Jacob refuses because his own life has been a surprise given by God. He would not, as an old man, resist that surprise for the next generation.²

At long last – Joseph has come to understand grace. God chooses the weak, the poor, the powerless – so that no one can boast – so that He gets the glory.

God works His power not through a King of incredible power – but through the crucified One.

Jacob is saying – Joseph – as mighty as you are – as incredible as your life is – you must learn the glory of grace. No one earns salvation – not even you.

It is unmerited and undeserved. It is a gift to the unworthy – the lame, blind, poor and lepers. It is a gift to a man like me – a sinner.

Manasseh will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he.

The younger will become greater. Ephraim becomes the greater tribe – larger and more prominent than Manasseh. Ephraim comes to be the dominant tribe of the ten tribes of the northern kingdom – such that often the ten tribes are merely called Ephraim.

A testimony to the unmerited grace of God.

Verse 20:

He blessed them that day and said, "In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing: 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.'" So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

May Israel and all the children of Abraham and all the redeemed come to be like Ephraim and Manasseh – those who understand the glory of grace and the way God gives grace to those who do not deserve it.

That is why he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

Finally he repeats his opening theme – *Remember the Glory of Grace*.

² Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (John Knox, 1982), p.364.

Verses 21-22:

Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die, but God will be with you and take you back to the land of your fathers. And to you, as one who is over your brothers, I give the ridge of land I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow."

Jacob says – I am about to die – but the Lord who has been with me – will be with you.

He will return you to the land.

Jacob knows from Genesis 15 that they will be in Egypt for 400 years. He knows that it will take generations to turn from a family into a nation. But he knows that they will return and as a token of his faith that eventually their descendants will return – he gives to Joseph's family a portion of the land of promise.

Joseph will not live there – but his descendants will.

Again – this promise goes beyond the land. Jacob is dying – but he will see the real promised land – heaven – and by faith and the grace of God – Joseph and Ephraim and Manasseh will see heaven.

Egypt is not their home – heaven is.

Let me by addressing several groups.

First, all of the children and teenagers here.

It would have been easy for Ephraim and Manasseh to say – we have a great godly dad – Joseph. We are born into the promised family. We are going to heaven.

But Jacob knew that was not enough. This whole chapter – putting the younger son ahead of the older – talking about trusting the Great Shepherd and Redeemer – Jacob is saying – your parent's faith is not enough – if you don't have faith – if you don't trust God yourself – then you won't see heaven.

Sometimes you grow up in a church – with Christian parents – Christian friends – and assume that makes you a Christian. No! If you don't have your own personal faith – if you don't trust that Jesus died for *you* – if you don't ask Jesus to be your Saviour – then you are not a Christian.

You have to make that choice.

You need to believe that Jesus has paid for your sins – you need to trust Him – you need to give your life to Him. Talk with your parents – don't just assume that you are a Christian.

Now, let me address those who are parents and grandparents.

Jacob was a man who lived for this world. He asked God for material blessing. He wept when he lost his favoured wife and son. But at the end he realised only *one* thing mattered – whether he had led his sons and grandsons to faith in the Redeemer.

When you reach the end of your days – you won't care if you have a stock portfolio or if you made a mark in your profession. But you *will* care – and care desperately whether your precious sons and daughters and grandchildren have followed Christ. Pray for them. Share with them. Tell them the glories of the Shepherd who is with you all your days and who redeems you from all evil.

Don't neglect this task.

Finally, to those who have had a tough path through this life.

I want to remind you that Jacob is in the Hall of Faith because at the end of his days – when he had the perspective of a long life – he could say – through every trial that so vexed my soul I now know that my Shepherd was with me.

He finally came to realise that even when he walked through the valley of the shadow of death – God – His faithful Shepherd was right by His side. The rod and staff were not punishment but instruments of love to bring him back to the path.

We may not understand why the trials come – why tragedies strike – why the pain is great – but we can know that God is using it for our good.

And we can throw away the bitterness and say with thankfulness – My Shepherd has always been with me. My Jesus has redeemed me from all evil. I am the most blessed of his children.