

The Lord Is My Shepherd

Genesis 48:1-22

What should we remember Jacob for? What event should we use to best illustrate his faith? For Noah, that would be an easy question. In Hebrews 11, Noah is remembered for building an ark. Abraham is remembered for leaving the land of his father. He is also remembered for his willingness to offer his son Isaac upon the altar of sacrifice. Moses is remembered for leaving Egypt, keeping the Passover and passing through the Red Sea. Joshua is remembered for the occasion when the walls of Jericho came falling down.

But what about Jacob? How should we remember him? Well, in Hebrews 11 he is remembered for the event which we find in our text this morning.

Hebr. 11:21 “By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.”

Of all the things that the writer of Hebrews might have chosen, it might surprise you that he chose this one. Not the vision of the ladder ascending and descending into heaven. Not leaving the land of Canaan for Egypt. But the occasion of Jacob blessing the sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim.

v.1-2

So the question is, how is that a testimony of faith? In what way do we see,

I. JACOB’S FAITH IN GOD.

What is it about this blessing given to the two boys that makes this such a great act of faith? To begin to answer those questions, let me read again the end of chapter 47.

Gen.47:29 “When the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, “Now if I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt, 30 but let me lie with my fathers; you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place.” And he said, “I will do as you have said.” 31 Then he said, “Swear to me.” And he swore to him. So Israel bowed himself on the head of the bed.”

Some time later, probably rather soon, though we don’t know for sure, we read that, Jacob again sat up in bed. Presumably, again in worship and in conscious awareness of God’s presence.

v.1-2

It is clearly implied that Jacob knew an important work was about to be done, and he wanted to do it well. He knew he was about to act as God’s representative for the last time before his own death. And so he spoke to his son Joseph words of great faith. Specifically, what we see is that,

A. Jacob believed God’s promises.

He really believed them. He really believed that what God had said would happen would actually happen. He really believed that what God had promised would come to pass. He believed it. It hadn’t happened yet. And Jacob wouldn’t see it in his lifetime. But it would happen. Because God promised. That was his faith. Sure and certain.

v.3-4

Jacob himself wouldn’t live to see that, but he believed it anyway. That is the very definition of faith. In the words of,

Hebr. 11:13 “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and

pilgrims on the earth.”

Such a great promise. A promise spoken by God Almighty, El Shaddai, God the powerful one. At Luz, or Bethel, God had appeared to Jacob. Jacob would become a fruitful and vast nation. The land would be an everlasting possession for his descendants. Jacob believed that promise! And even his burial would testify to his faith. So he asked his son Joseph to take him back to the land of Canaan.

v.21

Notice that the promise focused on eternal things, for it was an everlasting possession. That eternal focus went all the way back to Abraham.

Gen. 17:7 “And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. 8 Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

In that eternal sense, the promise is still valid today. Peter makes that very clear.

1Pet. 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

An eternal inheritance! Our promised reward, for in Christ, at the final judgment, we shall hear these words,

Matt. 25:34 “Then the King will say to those on His right hand,

‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”

That inheritance is guaranteed! For we read in,

Eph. 1:13 “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

We, the New Covenant people of God, will inherit this promise of an eternal inheritance made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And Jacob believed that. I believe it, too. For this is the message of the gospel.

As I preach to you this morning, I proclaim this message to you. Through faith in Jesus Christ, by believing in his name and receiving him with your own personal commitment, you are given the promise of eternal life, an eternal inheritance in heaven. Believe these things, and proclaim them to others, for this is life.

Acts 4:12 “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Jacob not only believed the promise for himself, but he passed it on.

B. Jacob passed God’s promises on to the next generation.

He does so by claiming for himself the two sons of Joseph. Manasseh and Ephraim. There is actually a sense of a formal adoption process in these words. Jacob claims his grandsons as his own sons. And from here on, he actually includes those two

grandsons among the twelve.

v.5

We see that formally declared by Jacob in,

v.16

Indeed, those boys, Manasseh and Ephraim would come to represent God's blessing.

v.20

There was some obvious restrictions given, that only those two would be included.

v.6

And then a reason was given for the adoption.

v.7

Such tender words, revealing such a depth of love that hardly diminished after Rachel's death. It had so clearly been Jacob's desire to marry Rachel, and his involvement with Leah and the handmaids came only as a result of Laban treachery. But Rachel was his true love, and by natural rights, Rachel's children should have been his only children.

Therefore, Rachel's firstborn should have been Jacob's firstborn, and in essence, that is what Jacob accomplishes here. Reuben and Simeon, born to Leah, forfeited their rights as the firstborn by their own wickedness. This is recorded in,

1Chr. 5:1 "Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel—he was indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy is not listed according to the birthright; 2 yet Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him came a ruler, although the birthright was Joseph's."

Joseph gained those rights, including the double portion of the inheritance which would be given directly to his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And a downpayment of that inheritance was given to Joseph.

v.22

There is a passing reference to that land in, John 4:5 "So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph."

All of that was certainly appropriate because of the great blessings which came to the whole family through Joseph. We no longer have the situation of a father playing favorites among his children, but of God exalting his chosen servant. And the point is, Jacob believed God. He believed God's promises and he passed them on to his children and grandchildren.

That's what faith is all about, believing God's promises. Faith isn't so much what you feel. It is what you believe! It isn't so much what you can explain or what you have or don't have. It is what you believe! But to believe God, you really have to know him, and in this great blessing we see,

II. JACOB'S KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

Notice how Jacob introduces his blessing upon Manasseh and Ephraim,

v.15-16

The blessing is based upon a sure and certain knowledge of God and who he is. He is the God of Abraham and Isaac. He is God the shepherd. And he is a deliverer, or redeemer. Let's look at God in those ways. First, the God of Abraham and Isaac. Why the reference to the life of Abraham and Isaac, whom Jacob calls

“my fathers.” What is the significance of mentioning his fathers? Simply this. To demonstrate that,

A. God is a covenant-keeping God.

Abraham and Isaac walked with God. And now, implies Jacob, so do I. In fact, he further implies, God will bless Manasseh and Ephraim because God had proven himself faithful to Abraham and Isaac. In other words, the blessings of God which come to us are based upon the assurance that God is a covenant-keeping God.

We read that covenant in,

Gen.17:7 “And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. 8 Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

God keeps the promise of the covenant. God is faithful to keep his promises. He is a covenant-keeping God. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our salvation. And so we read of Jesus’ words in,

John 10: 28 “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all ; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”

Jacob’s knowledge of God also includes the awareness that,

B. God is our shepherd.

Notice the end of,

v.15. “The God who has fed me all my life long to this day...”

The word “fed” there has a very specific meaning in Hebrew,

as it doesn’t simply refer to food, but is the word often translated shepherd. And it really should have that English translation in this verse, for this is the first reference in the Bible to God as a shepherd, an image that would become one of the most meaningful descriptions of God. In the ESV we read of “the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day.” It is the same Hebrew word used in Psalm 23, words show what a shepherd does for his people.

Ps. 23:1 “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.”

Those words were written by a man who knew God! The Lord is my shepherd. We also read about God the shepherd in,

Isa. 40:11 “He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young.”

We learn more about God as our shepherd in the NT, of course. The most familiar reference being Jesus’ own words in,

John 10:1 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his

voice. 5 Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” 6 Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them. 7 Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. 11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. 12 But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. 13 The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”

I should add that the word shepherd means to “pasture,” representing all the care and feeding given to sheep or other domestic animals. And another title for a shepherd in our language is the word “pastor.” Ultimately, God is our pastor, the shepherd of our souls. And so with specific reference to Jesus, we read in,

1Pet. 2:23 “...when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the

Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

Knowing God as a shepherd is absolutely crucial to maintain a lively and intimate relationship with him. And knowing God as a shepherd is absolutely crucial to be able to trust him by faith. For, since the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. In other words, since the Lord is my shepherd, I lack absolutely nothing. Everything I need, at all times and in all circumstances, is found in him.

Most of all, I know that the good shepherd has laid down his life for his sheep. He has laid down his life for me. And in that regard, we read of Jacob’s knowledge that,

C. God is our redeemer.

v.16

This Angel which has appeared to Jacob is, as we’ve seen, God himself. The angel of the Lord, God, is the one who delivers us from all harm, all evil. That is the meaning of the word redeem. Simply put, God redeems us from our sin. He himself paid the penalty for our sins, in the death of Christ upon the cross. And he himself delivers us from the bondage to sin and the sure and certain condemnation which that sins deserves. God is our redeemer.

You see, OT saints such as Jacob really did know God. They knew him well. And in that knowledge, they had great faith. But in the faith of Jacob we something more, something produced by that godly faith and genuine knowledge of God. Something that is often terribly lacking among God’s people today. And that is the godly virtue of submission. We see in Genesis 48,

III. JACOB’S SUBMISSION TO GOD.

Submission is really nothing more than allowing God to be God, and honoring God as God. Now, as we'll see with Jacob, submission to God is not a dry and painful thing, but rather the context for his greatest joy. Indeed, the path to joyful satisfaction in life is none other than genuine submission.

That attitude is well described by the words of,

Ps. 16:5 "O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot. 6 The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance. 7 I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons. 8 I have set the LORD always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. 9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope. 10 For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. 11 You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

Here in Genesis we see that,

A. Jacob rejoices in the goodness of God's sovereign providence.

He delights himself in what God has accomplished in his life.
v.8-11

Jacob had resigned himself to never seeing Joseph again, never knowing he was still alive, never knowing he even had children. In that submission to God's sovereign providence, he received the greatest delight imaginable. The tender moment is so precious,

v.10

So should we delight ourselves in God, and in the goodness of

his sovereign purpose in our life. Even when the circumstances don't seem so good! We are called to delight yourself in the Lord, to rejoice in his goodness, even as you submit to his perfect will being accomplished in every situation you face.

Again let me emphasize this point. There is great delight and real joy in godly submission. And there is great danger and horrible trouble in rebellion.

I almost wish we could come up for a different word with the same meaning, because the word "submission" brings up so many negative thoughts and even bad experiences. But let me assure you, as I preach the Bible to you, godly, gentle, wholehearted submission to the goodness of God's sovereign purpose in your life will give you more security and joyful satisfaction than anything else you could ever imagine. On God's authority, I promise you. For submission to God is directly related to our sense of joyful peace.

Notice the sense of submission so essential to the encouragement given in,

Ps. 46:8 "Come, behold the works of the LORD, Who has made desolations in the earth. 9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire. 10 Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! 11 The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge."

"Be still, and know that I am God." Be still, stop striving. Stop fighting with God. Stop resisting, or even worse, rebelling against him. Instead, joyfully submit to him. Receive every circumstance of your life as the good providence of his perfect will. That is what it means to be still.

One quick example from Jacob here.

B. Jacob honors God's sovereign choice to exalt the younger over the older.

This is such a pattern for God, to act contrary to human traditions and rules. God exalts the younger over the older. Isaac instead of Ishmael. Jacob instead of Esau. Joseph instead of Reuben, and now Ephraim instead of Manasseh.

v.12-14

Joseph quickly noticed that, and attempted to correct what he thought his father was doing in error.

v.17-18

But it wasn't an error. It was the Lord's sovereign will.

v.19-20

Jacob honored God's sovereign choice. He knew God. He believed God. And he submitted to God. May each of us follow in his godly example. Whatever your circumstances may be, even in the difficult ones, stand before God and be still, know that he is God. For,

Psalms 23:1 "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."

And so,

Hebr. 11:21 "By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped."