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GENESIS 48-49

Series: Understanding Your Roots

Anna called for me because she was dying. This was last year. She knew that she was dying. She had been to our church, visited a few times as she was going through her cancer treatments. But now she knew that she was dying and in her last days, so she called for me. I went over to her to the house where she was staying and my desire was to encourage her in the midst of the challenges that she was facing. When I got there, the caretaker says she can't really talk because just she's so weak in her life right now. But when I went into her room, all of a sudden she regained some strength. Although she could only whisper, she had lots of things to say to me. I listened to her talk about important things in her life. I listened to her talk about things just about her history. I mean she talked a lot in that time that I was with her and I went away encouraged. I came to encourage, but I went away encouraged by this lady who loved Jesus so much, even in her dying days.

I thought about that story this week as we entered our story in Genesis 48. If you don't have a Bible in front of you, you can go to the YouVersion of the Bible, where all of our notes are present. So if you go open your Bible, you can look at the YouVersion of the Bible. And when you open it up, you go to events, choose Calvary Chapel, and you'll see all of the scripture that we're going to use today. Those of you over here, you get to look at it.

But we're entering in this story into Jacob's room where he's dying. So the picture is Jacob is sick, he's dying, and his son and his grandkids come into the picture. They're coming into the situation so that they can see what's going on and they can spend some time with him. I want you to enter with me into the story, would you.

Notice Genesis 48:1. *Some time later Joseph was told, "Your father is ill." So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim... Now Manasseh is the older one; Ephraim is the younger one. That's why they're in that order – Manasseh and Ephraim along with him. When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to you," (notice what happened) Israel rallied his strength and sat up on the bed. You can just picture the story. You're in this room, and Israel sees his son and his grandsons, and so he gets his energy together and he's ready to do something. We're going to see what he does.*

Jacob said to Joseph (verse 3), "God Almighty..." Now, I just got to stop there because he's using the word El Shaddai. The Great God Almighty. He starts that way, even though he is very weak, I'm sure, and not saying it as loud as I am. But he's saying – "God Almighty appeared to me." And he's going to tell us about two of the most important decisions he made in his life. They're the most important decisions you'll make in your life too.

The first important decision that anyone can ever make is a personal relationship with God. He's going to tell us the story of how when he left home, went off to college, so to speak (although he was really going off to get a wife...although some people go to college do get a wife). But the point is, he was leaving home and he's going off now. You remember that story where he goes to bed that night and takes a rock and he uses that as a pillow. There was this stairway to heaven with angels ascending and descending, representing this opportunity for Jacob to have a personal relationship with God. God said to him, "I will be with you as you go on to Paddan Aram." And so he's going to tell us that story now.

Notice what he says. He says – *“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 do three things. I’m going to make you fruitful and 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.’”* So he's sharing within that most important decision.

Now look at verse 5. He says – *“Now then, your two sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine.”* Notice how he switches the order. Do you see that in the passage? He switches the order of the names. He says – *Ephraim and Manasseh*. He doesn't say Manasseh and Ephraim. He switches their names. That's going to be important as you kind of read through the story. He says – *“They will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine.”* So what he's doing is he's adopting these two boys as his own. They're going to have the same privileges as those would be in my family.

Here's what's actually happening. Joseph is eleventh of twelve boys. And what Jacob is doing is he's moving number eleven up to number one, because the firstborn is the one who receives the double blessing. They always get a double portion. Now Joseph is going to receive a double portion because of his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. He says I'm going to adopt them as my own.

He continues and he says in verse 6 – *Any children born to you after them will be yours; in the territory they inherit they will be reckoned under the names of their brothers.*

So that's his most important decision is his personal relationship with God. And if you've never made that commitment to God yourself, that is the number one decision that you will make in all of your life. Whether you're young or old, the most important decision is to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Now let's look at decision number two as we go into verse 7. *As I was returning from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan while we were still on the way, a little distance from Ephrath. So I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).* See the second most important decision you make has to do with your mate, who you're going to choose to get married to. The second most important decision you'll ever make in your life.

If you'll remember this story, although Jacob had four wives, Rachel was the one he really loved. He worked fourteen years for her. So he's describing her because she is the mother of Joseph.

She is the grandma of these two guys, Ephraim and Manasseh. So he's talking about her in the midst of this story. Very important part of what he's doing in this little speech he's making.

Verse 8 notice it says – *When Israel saw the sons of Joseph, he asked, “Who are these?”* Now I don't want you to think the guy has Alzheimer's and he can't remember what's going on because he just adopted them in the previous paragraph. Now he's saying, “Who are these guys?” No, that's not what is happening. He's basically saying, “Okay, guys, come here. Who are these guys? Come on over,” kind of in this friendly way, bringing them over. Notice what he what he says – *“They are the sons God has given me here,” Joseph said to his father. Then Israel said, “Bring them to me so I may bless them.”*

Now Israel's eyes were failing because of old age, and he could hardly see. We're going to have several details in this story revealed to us because Moses wants us to draw attention to the details, because it's in the details we're going to be able to get into the picture and see what's happening. So one of the things here is that he can't see very well what's happening. That's going to play a part in the story.

It says – *So Joseph brought his sons close to him, and his father kissed them and embraced them. Israel said to Joseph, “I never expected to see your face again, and now God has allowed me to see your children too.”* See he thought that his son died by the wild animals and now he not only gets to see his son, but he has the privilege of seeing his grandchildren as well. What a privilege that he has.

Verse 12 – *Then Joseph removed them from Israel's knees and bowed down with his face to the ground.* So just picture this. The boys move out of the way. Joseph is so grateful for his dad blessing him through his sons. He's so grateful to be with his dad and be able to spend time with his dad these last seventeen years. So he bows down in that picture.

Notice it says in verse 13 – *And Joseph took both of them (now watch the detail here; here it goes) Ephraim on his right toward Israel's left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel's right hand, and brought them close to him.* So you see what's happening there that there's a lot of detail going on, because it's the older one who's going to get the right hand (that's going to be Manasseh) and the younger one is going to get the left hand. That's just how it happens. That's tradition. That's what happens in the culture.

Well let's go on. Verse 14 says – *But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms (so he's doing this kind of thing), he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn.* So this is a little bit odd. Joseph is not going to like this.

Verse 15 he says – *Then he blessed Joseph and said...* Notice he's blessing Joseph through his sons, which is what happens with any of us as parents. We're blessed through our children. And so we really appreciate the blessing that happens in our kids' lives as parents. *Then he blessed Joseph and said, “May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day...”* I think, wow, what a beautiful picture. That's the kind of relationship that Jacob had, a shepherd relationship. It wasn't that God

was like a cattle rustler where He's whipping the cattle. No, it's the shepherd, the quiet voice of the shepherd calling them. The shepherd knows all the sheep. The shepherd can whistle this certain whistle and the sheep will come to him because there's this personal dynamic, this personal relationship that they enjoy. Verse 16 – *“...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 on the earth.”* What a beautiful blessing these boys are receiving.

But Joseph's got this problem in his mind. Notice verse 17. *When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim's head he was displeased; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. Joseph said to him, “No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.”* So Joseph's saying, “Alright Dad, I know you're old here. You can't see very well. Let me correct you.” Do you think Jacob is making a mistake? Jacob knows exactly what he's doing. And so in the next verse, verse 19, it says – *But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations.”*

And I, in my own study of this passage, paused here. I thought isn't that interesting that God often does things that are not traditional. God often does things that don't fit into the culture. God often does things that we don't expect in our lives. This is one of those things where I think you and I are the Ephraims. Where there are other people who have status, they have wealth, they have intelligence, they have beauty. They're the ones that really should get the blessing. But God says, “No, I'm going to pick you.” And He puts His right hand on our head and He says, “You're going to get that special blessing.” I go, wow, God, that is so cool. That I'm the Ephraim. And so are you. I mean, you can come before the Lord and say, “God, thank you for crossing the hands here. Thank you for giving me the blessing in my life. Oh Lord, I just need that in my own heart.” I think God wants to affirm you. With that special right hand. The right hand is a sign of strength to give that to you in your own heart, and your own life.

It just reminds me of the parable that Jesus told about the three stewards. You remember the story. One gets one money bag, the second steward gets two money bags, and the third steward gets five money bags. As I put myself into that parable, I know I'm a two money bag guy. That's just who I am. But in the parable there's no room for competition saying, “How come he got five and I only got two?” No, that doesn't happen. There's no room for boasting, say, “I got two. You only got one.” No. We have to be grateful for the two that we have. God has given you exactly what you need, according to your needs and abilities, talents, faithfulness. He's given you exactly what you need. And that is your blessing. Believe me, you would not want five money bags if you're only a two money bag person. Because you wouldn't be able to handle all the five money bags. God gives you exactly what you need. He puts the right hand of blessing on your head and says I want to give you this.

You and I are the Ephraims of this world. There are people around you that maybe look like they're doing better, they deserve the better blessing or something. But God says no, I'm going to give it to you.

I just love that picture of what's happening here in this story, because Jacob must know something about these or God is influencing the situation in a particular way to bless the younger, instead of the older. It reminds me of Jacob himself. He was the younger, right? His brother Esau was older, but God used Jacob and He worked through him. Even above them, Isaac. Isaac was the second born to Abraham, the first one was Ishmael. But God used the second born. God delights in doing things that are out of the box, nontraditional, not according to culture, not even what we expect sometimes. That's what God does. And that's what's happening in this passage. It's just a beautiful picture of what God is doing in this situation.

So 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.'"* Notice the order of the words again. Ephraim first and then Manasseh. You know what I'm impressed with here is just the fact that there's this blessing that goes on to the person here, and it's the right hand of blessing that's being shared with them.

I knew there was a Bible verse about the right hand of blessing. In fact, as I looked up Psalm 16:11, I found it, I realized that I think this is my father's life verse. If I remember correctly... Mom, I know you're watching or you'll probably listen to this sermon later, and remind me if that's true. That my dad's favorite verse was Psalm 16:11. Let me read it to you. It goes like this. *You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy, at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

There's this picture here of God is extending His right hand, the hand of strength out to us. We're receiving the tremendous blessing that's involved in that. What a privilege we have to experience the right hand of God's blessing in our own lives.

Well let's go back to the verses in verse 21. *Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die (I'll come back to that in a minute), but God will be with you and take you back to the land of your fathers. And to you I give one more ridge of land than to your brothers, the ridge I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow."*

In other words what he's saying is, I'm going to give you two portions here of the blessing. And so Jacob in this picture is just passing on this blessing. He has a private meeting with Joseph and the boys. But now he's going to open it up. So I'm going to quickly read through Genesis 49. Not because we don't have enough time, it's just because I just want to capture a few ideas that are in Genesis 49. Because now Jacob is going to have a big family meeting. He started with the small family meeting. Now he's going to have a big family meeting with all of them. And there are some warnings here for us about the blessing. God wants to extend a blessing to you in your life. But there's sometimes we get in the way and hinder the blessing that God wants us to experience.

Genesis 49. *Then Jacob called for his sons and said: "Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come. This is like a prophecy for all of them. Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel."* So he's got them all around here. And he's going to go through each one. Not in order of birth, probably just in order of their presence. He kind of sees them maybe in his dim eyesight, he can see which ones and he's going through and he's talking about each one.

He starts with the oldest. He says – *Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power.* I can imagine Rubens shoulders coming up, chest going out, thinking, “Ah...” until we read the next verse. He says – *Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father’s bed, onto my couch and defiled it.* If we read back in the in the story of Jacob, we read how Reuben slept with his father's concubines. He had a problem with immorality. I just got to say, if you got a problem with sexual immorality, you need to deal with it or you're going to miss out on the blessing that God has for you. That's what's happening here. He's not getting the blessing of the firstborn, because he has this problem and it kind of wrecked his life is what he's saying here.

Verse 5 – *“Simeon and Levi are brothers—their swords are weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased.* This is a reference to the story of Dinah, who was raped. And so they took matters into their own hands and created a revenge that was greater than the justice that was called for and killed everybody in the town. And so their anger prevents them now from experiencing the blessing. If you have a problem with anger, you want to deal with it or you're going to miss out on the blessing that God has for you. It says in verse 7 – *Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.*

Well, let's go on to verse 8 where Judah is talked about. *Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons will bow down to you.* This is Judah, Judah who had an immorality problem. I don't know if you remember, but he went into Tamar thinking she was a prostitute. He had an immorality problem. He had an anger problem. You remember that? He was the one who spoke to his brothers and said, “Let's do this. That guy with a coat always, Joseph, let's sell him into slavery.” So it was his idea. But it was also Judah who came to Joseph and Joseph in Genesis 44 listens to Judah with his long plea of brokenness in his own heart. This brokenness that says, “Okay, let me stay here in my brother's place, Benjamin in prison, and you let him go.” There's this brokenness. I think it's because of that brokenness that now he's not punished. Now he does receive the blessing. Which gives us all hope. If you have a problem in your life that's hindering you from experiencing the blessing, get over it. Deal with it so you can experience the blessing of God.

Well, let's go on here. Let's go to verse 9. Oh this is more about Judah. And there's a reference here because the line of Christ goes through Judah, you remember? So you're going to see some references to Christ as I read this rather significant prophecy. It says – *You are a lion’s cub, Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk.* So that's all the prophecy to Judah, who gets to the privileged place of the line of Christ as it passes down all the way through to Jesus Himself.

Now if you think about the land and how it's divided up, it'll make sense if you're looking at the next verses. Because as Jacob in his mind is imagining the inheritance they are all going to

receive, he's imagining the land that he's been in. He's not there now. But they're going to go back and they're going to experience that.

So verse 13 – *Zebulun will live by the seashore and become a haven for ships; his border will extend toward Sidon.*

Issachar is a rawboned donkey lying down among the sheep pens. When he sees how good is his resting place and how pleasant is his land, he will bend his shoulder to the burden and submit to forced labor. In other words, he's going to do the hard work necessary because he understands the blessing. Do you feel like that sometimes? I understand they get a blessing, but I got all this hard work I got to do right now. That's what's happening with this guy Issachar.

Let's go to Dan. Verse 16 – *Dan will provide justice for his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan will be a snake by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider tumbles backward.* Dan is going to be up in the north. It says – *I look for your deliverance, Lord.* So Dan is representing justice, as it says. And if you remember Samson is the one that comes from the line of Dan, that creates this justice for Israel during that time.

Verse 19 – *Gad will be attacked by a band of raiders, but he will attack them at their heels.*

Asher's food will be rich; he will provide delicacies fit for a king.

Naphtali is a doe set free that bears beautiful fawns.

And now we come to Joseph. Verse 22 – *Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall. With bitterness archers attacked (just imagine the life that Joseph had when he was attacked); they shot at him with hostility. But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd (again, that idea of the shepherd), the Rock of Israel, because of your father's God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you with blessings of the skies above, blessings of the deep springs below, blessings of the breast and womb. Wow. Your father's blessings are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains, than the bounty of the age-old hills. Let all these rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the prince among his brothers.* That's Joseph.

And then one more guy, Benjamin. *Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey, in the evening he divides the plunder.*

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him. Then he gave them these instructions: "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites."

When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

It's a very touching story, obviously, being with someone when they're dying, to hear the words that they have to say. The words in verse 21 of the previous chapter, Genesis 48:21, are striking to me because Jacob is speaking to Joseph and he says this to them: *I am going to die, but God will be with you.* The *God will be with you* part is the logo. It's the motto of Jacob's life. When he left home and went off to Paddan Aram, God said, "I will be with you." When he left Paddan Aram to come back, he was afraid about Esau and he wrestled with the angel there. Then God said, "I will be with you when you go." When Jacob was coming down from Israel down to Egypt, he paused at Beersheba and God says I will go down to Egypt with you. And now he's passing that same blessing unto his son, Joseph. It says I'm going to die, but God will be with you.

We all need that in our lives. The *God will be with you* apart. I think that's why Jesus when He gave us the Great Commission says, "Go out and make disciples of the whole world." And then He says, "And I will be with you always, even to the end of the earth." Wow.

I trust that God will use this particular message in your heart to speak to you. And so that you can say in your heart, no matter what happens in your life, you know it's well with my soul. This idea that God is doing something in my life and in my heart that's powerful and I want to embrace that. I want to enjoy that. I want to appreciate what God has done in my life and continues to do. I want the blessing. I'm the special one, the Ephraim, and I want to receive that. I want to enjoy that. I want God to lead me like a shepherd. I want that personal relationship with Him that I can enjoy. Boy, take that because it's the words of a dying man here that allow us to live and to live that abundant life and that precious life that God would have for us.

I hope that you'll take something out of this story, apply it to your life so you can experience life this week. If you'd like prayer for an area of your life, then when we sing this song come up and we'll pray for you.

Would you stand with me? Let's sing this one more song together. I think you might even know this one by memory.