

TREASURED WORDS FOR JOSEPH

Genesis 48: 1-7 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Today, in this Joseph story, and in many ways, in this Jacob story, we come to the edge of the cliff of life for Jacob. We stand here at the cliff with Joseph as we read our text. Jacob knew his days were coming rapidly to a close. He knew it was time to set his house in order. He knew it was time to call the Prime Minister of Egypt, his eldest son of his wife, Rachel. He must call Joseph. He had final words to give to Joseph, before he called for all his sons to come in for his final blessing. When Joseph got the word that his father was ill, life was not business as usual. When sickness comes that appears to be our final battle to live, it's wonderful when our children, like Joseph, sense our soon Homegoing, and come running to our side.

Let's reflect on the life of Jacob. Like him, we as believers in Jesus, are not self-determined, independent, autonomous beings. We are fully dependent on the Lord and His leading of us. We are led, prodded, prompted, and shepherded by the Lord Jesus Christ. Our lives are not lived with us in control. Jacob lived to the ripe old age of 147, over twice the age of Pastor Jerry who died last Monday at the age of 68. None of us are in control of the day God calls us Home for there is an appointed time for each of us. With all our varied tasks before us to accomplish, God has designed our lives to be lived with Him seated at the wheel. Knowing God is in control is enough. Yet, each of us, like Pastor Jerry, and Jacob, each of us will come to the end of our lives, the place where the earthly road ends, and we are airborne for Glory when God calls us Home. Genesis 48: 1-7 is about Joseph coming to his daddy's side, to his sick-bed, to his death-bed and Jacob knew, God was calling him Home. Joseph knew in his soul, as well, this was his dad's last bout with illness and his last battle to live in this life.

So, Joseph never came alone this time to see his father. He came with his two eldest sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. These sons were not little boys. They were already born 17 years earlier when Jacob arrived in Goshen, so they were probably 20-22 years old—young adults. When Joseph walked into the house, someone, perhaps a servant told Jacob, "Your son, Joseph has come to you." Although Joseph's sons were there with him, Jacob had words he spoke first with Joseph, doubtless as Manasseh and Ephraim listened in with the deepest interest. The words of Jacob to Joseph were intimate, treasured, last words with history lessons in them that were not only good for Joseph to hear, as well as his sons, but words that are especially good for you and me to hear. Last words by anyone who knows and loves God, are often words with history lessons that never leave us the same—history lessons that change us for good. History lessons shared as final words put a final seal on life—attaching us and those we love to God and His grace. Let's

listen in to Jacob's words and learn the history lessons Joseph learned that day as Jacob was wrapping up his tent, folding the sheets, packing his pillow, and getting ready to move to the sky. What are these five history lessons?

HISTORY LESSON # 1 IS, "WE, LIKE JACOB, ARE WEAK, BUT GOD IS STRONG." (I.) Notice v. 2. "And it was told to Jacob, "Your son Joseph has come to you." Then Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed." The word brought to Joseph that Jacob was sick was a word that meant more than he was going blind, was very old, and in bed. The Hebrew word used is **chalah** or **khawlaw**. Khawlaw gives the sense of a person being worn out, or quickly wearing out through sickness or aging, too exhausted to live. Joseph came, bringing his two eldest sons along, Manasseh and Ephraim. When Jacob is mentioned, he is spoken of, like we are on our own—weak, feeble, and too sick to live long. Yet, when Jacob is called Israel, a prince with God, Israel strengthened himself and sat up on his bed. Jacob the man of flesh and bones, as we are, was weak in his body and spirit, troubled often in his mind. When Moses tells the story of Israel, the man who wrestled with God, who proclaimed God's name, El Shaddai, Israel speaks for God under His empowerment and inspiration, whereas when Jacob speaks, it seems to be as Jacob, the man. We all live in our body of flesh, but with the Holy Spirit empowering us, we live in the Spirit that God has granted. This is our constant struggle! Are we relying on ourselves or are we relying on God? Israel now strengthened himself through God's strength and he rose to the occasion to sit up on his bed. These few treasured words to his son, Joseph, must not be spoken lying down. He would muster the strength as Israel to call on God Almighty to be able to speak to his son.

Our weakness does not diminish God's power. Our weakness in fact magnifies God's power as Paul says in II Corinthians 12: 9, as God says, "My power is made perfect in weakness." Are you feeling too weak to pray or too hopeless to hope again? We must come to God in our weakness to access His strength. That's true when we come to Jesus to be converted. It's true every day of our lives, and it is true at the moment we are dying. As the song we sang as children, so it is true always. "Little ones to Him belong, they are weak, but He is strong." The relationship each of us have with God is based on our need and His sufficiency, to meet our needs, and on our incompleteness completed by his perfections and His power. This understanding of God is meant to inform the way we pray. We pray as Jacob, but as we pray, we are transformed into "Israels" for God's glory.

HISTORY LESSON # 2 IS, "WE, LIKE JACOB, ARE BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING." (II.) Notice v. 3, 4. "And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me."_And God 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.” This “blessed to be a blessing God” we serve, Jacob here calls in Hebrew **El-Shaddai**. This meaning of El-Shaddai means God Almighty. El points to the power of God Himself. Shaddai is a motherly word derived from the Hebrew word meaning breast or breast-feeding. El Shaddai signifies the God who nurses us, nourishes us, supplies our needs, and satisfies our souls. God as El helps, but God as Shaddai abundantly blesses us with all manner of divine blessings. This special blessing was that the land of Israel was for all Israel—“an everlasting possession.” Never doubt God Almighty—El Shaddai—the land is Israel’s forever.

Jacob speaks of El-Shaddai appearing to him at Luz. Didn’t God appear to Jacob at Bethel? These treasured words of Jacob to his son, Joseph were words of comfort and assurance about his dying father. All words of comfort must be grounded in reality, in the Word of God; they must not be merely deceptive words. Words of hope need a baseline in truth and reality. Words without truth are a delusive dream, hopeless words at best. So, Jacob reminded his son of a true history lesson from his own past. He said, “El Shaddai appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there He blessed me. So why did Jacob call Bethel—the house of God, Luz, now as he was ready to die? Luz was the name of the place Jacob’s ladder to heaven appeared. It means “to turn aside from wisdom—as a twisted person. Isn’t it amazing God wanted Jacob whose name means cheater, that God appeared to him at Luz—part of this earth Paul calls a “crooked and perverse generation?”

As Jacob was fleeing from his angry older brother Esau for deceiving his father Isaac in stealing the birthright, God met Jacob at Luz. Before the night was over, Jacob saw Almighty God at the top of a ladder full of angels ascending and descending from earth to heaven. Those words of promise God gave to Jacob were mighty words to a deceitful man. The Lord stood atop the ladder and said, Genesis 28: 13-15, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie (Luz) 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.” Then you remember Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.” And Jacob renamed this twisted place—the house of God. Why was Jacob retelling this mighty story to Joseph? Because God repeated this same message to Jacob after he wrestled with God at the Jabbok brook, and after being finally reconciled with his brother. God called Jacob back to Bethel now with his family. Then God appeared a second time to Jacob and said, Genesis 35: 9-12,

“Your name is Jacob, no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name. So He called his name Israel. And God said to him, “I am God Almighty—El Shaddai: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give to your, and I will give land to your offspring after you.” Jacob knew he was blessed to be a blessing. But his blessing was no mere hopeless delusion. Remember when Jacob was getting ready to go to see Joseph after 22 years of thinking he was dead? In Beersheba, Jacob needed reassurance so once again, in Genesis 46: 2, we read, “And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here am I.” Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I Myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph’s hand shall close your eyes.” That moment was almost upon Jacob and Joseph, as Jacob handed the baton of God’s blessing to Joseph. I ask each of you. Have you been blessed by your parents as Joseph was? Has God appeared to you at “Luz” in your life? Have you shared that story, passing it on as God’s blessing on you to pass on? Maybe it’s been a mentor you have had that has blessed you—a father figure like Jacob? Have you received their blessing and are you passing it on to others? God help us all to never forget Jacob’s history lesson—“we are blessed to be a blessing.”

HISTORY LESSON # 3 IS, “WE, LIKE JACOB, ARE SOMETIMES CALLED BY GOD TO CLAIM CHILDREN AS OUR OWN ADOPTED CHILDREN, TO HAVE A FULL SHARE IN OUR INHERITANCE.(III.)

Notice v. 5. “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 (Jacob’s firstborn) are.” Notice, for Jacob, his adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh was both a physical and a spiritual adoption. Jacob’s treasured words to Joseph, at this point, seem to have passed by Joseph’s attention to detail. Joseph’s eldest son was **Manasseh**, whose name means – causing to forget. Joseph and his wife, Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara, the priest of On, named him Manasseh for Joseph said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.” The second son was **Ephraim**, whose name means, fruitful, or fruit-bearing, for Joseph said, “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.” What occurred here was Jacob was displacing Reuben and Simeon, and giving the birthright to Joseph—by adopting his two eldest sons and making them part of God’s covenant line. By this adoption, Jacob moved Ephraim and Manasseh to an equal footing and position with his other sons as redemptive history was unfolding. But, before Jacob got specific on the order of his blessing, notice Moses spoke of Manasseh and Ephraim in verse 1, but now Jacob mentioned Ephraim and Manasseh. Was it a slip of the tongue, because he was old

–147 years old? Joseph must have thought so at first, but Jacob gave an indication of supremacy within the adoption. Since the eldest son was to get a double portion, God gave Joseph the double portion instead of Reuben, though in the 12 tribes, Joseph is never mentioned, but Ephraim and Manasseh are. This means Jacob had 14 sons. Levi got no land inheritance as God was his inheritance, and Joseph was not named because his double portion went to his two eldest sons. In 1 Chronicles 5:1, 2, we read, “The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel, for he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father’s couch, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that he (Reuben) could not be enrolled as the oldest son.” Despite Joseph’s youngest son, Ephraim becoming Jacob’s firstborn, the right to rule the obedience of the brothers, and the Savior Himself, Jesus Christ, came through Judah, not Joseph. Beloved, God led Jacob to do a mighty thing—something almost unheard of. It prefigures what Jesus does with us, adopting us into His family. God may lead some of us to either physically or spiritually adopt a son or daughter, and even elevate them to a co-equal with our other children. If God so leads, follow Him. He has his own reasons for doing what he does. Follow the Lord. He does all things well.

HISTORY LESSON # 4 IS, WE, LIKE JACOB, SHOULD TEACH OUR CHILDREN TO PASS ON THEIR UNIQUE SPIRITUAL LEGACY AND INHERITANCE TO THEIR CHILDREN. (IV.)

Notice that all the rest of Joseph’s children were to be called by the name of either Manasseh or Ephraim. Notice verse 6. “And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance,” (meaning they would take be numbered among the tribes either of Ephraim or Manasseh). We have not record of Joseph having more children, but that only confirms that Joseph followed his father’s instructions. Notice verse 6—“And the children that you fathered shall be yours.” To give them names to appear in a geneology would go against the baton and legacy Jacob was passing on to Joseph. All Joseph’s other sons would either be Ephraimites or Manassehites. I ask you today, beloved, what baton, what unique legacy are you giving your sons and daughters to pass on? Don’t apologize for it. God has given me as a father and a grandpa a legacy of rearing our children with God’s “hope for the home,” and a legacy of learning in God’s “Nazareth International Training University,” where Jesus was trained until he was thirty—meaning we are never too old to learn and receive discipline, for the ground is level at the foot of the cross. My children, whether physical or spiritual, children or grandchildren, also know that legacy includes “finish the course.”

HISTORY LESSON # 5 IS, WE, LIKE JACOB MUST NEVER FORGET OUR ETERNAL CONNECTION TO EPHRATH, THAT IS, BETHLEHEM.

(V.) Notice verse 7. “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).” Twice Jacob reminded Joseph that his mommy, Rachel died on the road to Bethlehem, Ephrata or Ephrath. Twice I read Ephrath in verse 7. It is striking! Then I noticed something that was so odd it arrested me. As I was reading in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia on the name Ephraim or Ephraimite. I know Hebrew but I had missed it. Ephraim is a plural, but of what, the singular is ephrati. We know that Ephraim means fruitful, or fruit-bearing, but what does Ephrati or Ephrath mean? Watch out! It was a moment I stood in-awe of God. The im at the end of Ephraim makes it the plural of Ephrath, which means “the ash heap.” Ephrath is the place where Rachel died, KJV says “died by me.” ESV is right that she died, but literally, it means Rachel died in Jacob’s arms, to his great sorrow, as she brought Benjamin into the world. For Jacob, Ephrath, which means Bethlehem was the ash heap of his life. He loved Rachel, and longed to marry her, but Laban tricked him into the arranged marriage with her older sister Leah. Parent arranged marriages are not the panacea of life. It’s great to marry the love of your life.

Rachel, in death, was withheld from having more children, for Jacob as she was finally, not barren, but bearing children. Dying in bearing Benjamin, now Rachel by this adoption had two more sons, Ephraim and Manaseh. By using Ephrath twice, it is as if Jacob is remembering the ash heap, but knowing Ephrath would become a great nation—Ephraim—a fruitful house of bread—Bethlehem. When I think of the name of Rachel, I get goose-bumps—Rachel means to journey or most often, a ewe—or a ewe lamb. I can’t help but join Jacob in crying. For the One born in Bethlehem was led as a lamb to the slaughter—Isa. 53:7. Then I notice Jacob shortens the place he left, Paddan-aram to just use Paddan. Paddan is only used here, but of the 11 times it shows up in Scripture, this is the only time Paddan is only used. Do you want to know what paddon means? It comes from the Hebrew word pada which means to deliver or ransom.

I’m not one that wants to ever make more of word meanings than I should, but what treasured words was Jacob speaking to Joseph? Jacob and Joseph both faced sorrow and they knew their roads of sorrow led toward Bethlehem. To see a lamb, ransom, ash heap, and fruitful bearing house of bread all together in one Hebrew sentence is a signal for me to stop and say, “I’m no Jew, but I am grafted into the vine.” There’s some pathos mixed with glory here. I want the Lord Jesus to come and explain it more to me. Micah 5: 2 tells us Messiah, Christ would be born in Bethlehem Ephratah...All believers have our roads to Ephrath, from our ash heaps to the arms of Jesus, to our Bethlehem. God gives us beauty for ashes. Even in Jesus’ day, in Matthew 2: 16-18, Bethlehem and its surroundings were the road of sorrow, as Jesus was born to die. When Herod tried to kill Jesus as a young child,

and failed, he killed all the male children in and around Bethlehem and in all that region who were 2 years old and upward. Then was fulfilled the word spoken by the weeping prophet Jeremiah in Jer. 31: 15, saying “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.” It makes me think of the old Gospel song that begins at Bethlehem with the virgin birth of Jesus, from the line of the tribe of Judah, that leads from Bethlehem to Jerusalem to the cross. Jesse Brown Pounds wrote this song that says it all to me, in 1906, “I must needs go home by the way of the cross, There’s no other way but this; I shall ne’er get sight of the Gates of Light, If the way of the cross I miss. The way of the cross leads home, The way of the cross leads home. It is sweet to know as I onward go, The way of the cross leads home.”

As we sang today, “O Mighty Cross,” the words are so full—“His sacrifice on Calvary, has made the mighty cross a tree of life to me. And as I close, I believe Chris Tomlin’s song says it best, expressing the reversals God makes in our lives. “Water You turned into wine, Opened the eyes of the blind, There’s no one like You, None like You; Into the darkness You shine, **OUT OF THE ASHES WE RISE**, there’s no one like You, None like You. Our God is greater; Our God is stronger; God You are higher than any other. Our God is Healer, Awesome in power, Our God. (Romans 8: 31) And if our God is for us, than who could ever stop us, And if our God is with us, then who can stand against?” May God seal these treasured and sacred words of Jacob to Joseph to our very souls and spirits today. I love you. Let’s pray!