

Genesis 49: 13-21; "The Prophetic Blessings of Jacob", (Part 2),
Sermon # 117 in the series - "Beginnings", Delivered by
Pastor Paul Rendall, on December 9th, 2007,
in the Morning Worship Service.

The prophetic blessings of Jacob to his sons can be divided into the ones which were favorable to them, and those which were unfavorable to them. The words which were spoken to the first three sons mentioned; Reuben, Simeon, and Levi can not be considered as favorable to them. We looked at this the last time that I preached to you, and we saw that the gross sins that these men committed in the past had affected their blessings to their descendants as well as themselves. They could only be atoned for by their coming to believe in the promises of forgiveness and blessing that were given to their brother Judah, in the promise given to him, that one of His descendants would be the Messiah, or "Shiloh" as He is referred to there. Shiloh means "prosperous one". He would be the one who would bring quiet and peace to the heart which is troubled by sin. The lesson that we learned was; that the troubled heart that wants to deal with its sins will only find salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. All of our sins can be forgiven and our life can be salvaged and rescued to serve the living God, and to live a life to His glory if we will trust Him and obey the gospel. All of the prophecies which follow the one given to Judah, if you will notice, are favorable to the son to whom the blessing is given.

I intend this morning to look at 6 more of the sons mentioned, leaving the prophecies concerning Joseph and Benjamin to the next sermon. As I looked at these prophetic blessings, I was wondering what could be said of them that would be profitable to us who are listening today. And knowing that you are looking for a word from God; it came to me that each of these men, each of these tribes being mentioned here, is mentioned as displaying a distinct quality or characteristic that is commended by Jacob. Jacob assigns one good characteristic to each of these six sons as being a tribute to God, of His grace at work in them. So I want to bring these 6 godly characteristics to your attention this morning so that you and I will learn what God thinks is desirable in a Christian and desirable in every church. If these qualities are desirable to God and commended by Jacob, I would think that each of us should desire these qualities for ourselves and for our church.

The 1st is found in Zebulun; He will be a Haven for Ships. (Verse 13)

"Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall adjoin Sidon." A haven is a place of shelter and safety for ships. It is port or destination into which ships come to find refuge. It

is a place sought after and rejoiced in when it is found. It is usually a place which is known to the sea-going captain or sailor before he gets there. He is usually trying to get there so that he will find and obtain the things that he needs to find to be sheltered, to be provided for, and to find comforts in his journey. A haven is a place where God or man has provided something for us which we really need and we cannot have unless and until we go there. Turn with me to Psalm 107 and we will find a Biblical example of what I am talking about. Often when the word "haven" is used, the adjective "safe" is placed in front of it. The people of our text here were most certainly looking for "safe haven". Verse 23 tells us about their predicament. Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters, they see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep." "For He commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up the waves of the sea." "They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths; their soul melts because of trouble." "They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end." "Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of the their distresses." "He calms the storm, so that its waves are still." "Then they are glad because they are quiet; so He guides them to their desired haven." "Oh that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!"

Notice that even though these men are sailors, even though they regularly do their business upon the sea; this is how they earn their living; that even so, they understand that it is the Lord who gives them safety in their travel. It is the Lord who guides them to their safe haven; their desired haven. The text makes it plain that the sailors who are being spoken of are very much aware of God's sovereignty in regard to the sea. "They see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep." They see that it is "He who commands and raises the stormy wind which lifts up the waves of the sea." They understand that if they come into trouble and distress on the sea while they are doing their business, that they simply must pray to God; they must cry out to him, that He would let them find a safe haven.

I believe that we can couple these thoughts with the reality of what Zebulun would become as it is written in verse 13. "Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea; He shall become a haven for ships." The sea is a picture of life as we know it. Sometimes the sea is quiet and calm. Sometimes it is turbulent and dangerous. Zebulun, because of the position that he took, the place where he settled; he would become a haven for ships. He would be a haven of the sea. This, I am saying, is a very good quality for all Christians and all true churches of Jesus Christ. They should desire this so that they might glorify God and give true spiritual help to people around them, especially other Christians. No one needs to go seeking trouble on the sea of life; it will in time come to them. There

are many trials, many difficulties in passing through this life; through this sin-cursed world, and people are going to need the help of our God. Not only that, but God in His sovereign wisdom will ordain that the stormy winds be lifted up in our lives and the lives of others as well. What would God have us to do? The way that God often chooses to help people who are tossed by sin is through Christian people who are loving and kind, becoming a haven for them. He helps them through people who provide a haven for them, even as Zebulun did for the ships which came to him. But they provide this haven, all the while, pointing to God Himself as the answer to their difficulties. They point to Jesus Christ as the Savior and Deliverer who died for sinners so that they might find safe haven from the wrath of God.

Ask yourself this morning, "Am I a Zebulun?" Do I love, and care for, and show compassion to sinners on the storm tossed sea of life? Do I love my neighbor as myself? Do I treat others as I myself would want to be treated when I am in need? Am I a haven, where those who are troubled and vexed by problems in their life, see me as someone who is stable, and wise, and approachable? All Christians who desire to glorify God and serve the Lord Jesus Christ ought to study to see how they could become a haven not only for sinners in need who are seeking help; but also other saints in need who are seeking help. If you are not this haven, this refuge for people to come to; if you do not see yourself in this way; will you not cry to God that He might make you so?

The 2nd Quality that, according to God and to Jacob, is desirable in a Christian is to know, as Issachar, the value both of work and rest.

(Verse 14)

"Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between two burdens; he saw that rest was good, and that the land was pleasant; He bowed his shoulder to bear a burden and became a band of slaves." Issachar is pictured here as a strong burden bearer; a strong donkey. There is no other creature, the size of a donkey, who can carry such a big burden as that animal can. It can carry a very heavy load on both sides of its body. It is capable of being patient and unwearied in its labors as it works the fields for its master. It also knows also, after working long and hard, how to crouch down or to lie down between two burdens to rest, at the right time, so that it will be able to have strength to labor again after resting. A Christian, who would follow after the Lord Jesus Christ, is also a burden-bearer. He is like the horse or the mule who is in His Master's service. He is stubborn in his desire to serve Christ. He has taken up His cross and will follow Him. He knows that he is only strong in this way because of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has lain down between the two burdens of the weight of his own sinfulness and his great desire to do His Master's will. He wants to labor for His Master "from dawn to setting sun." He is laboring for His Master as "the Lord's

freedman". He does not need a bit and bridle to hold him in check. He wants His Master to instruct him and teach him in the way that He should go, as it says in Psalm 32. He wants the Lord to "guide him with His eye upon him." The Christian knows the value of labor. He does not see it in a negative light. It is something that he is called to. "In all labor there is profit," it says in Proverbs 14: 23, "but idle chatter leads only to poverty." Proverbs 13: 11 says, "Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, but he who gathers by labor will increase."

The Christian comes to see the great value of both physical and spiritual labor by looking to Jesus Christ who said, "Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gently and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." A Christian can be strong in His labors because He knows that His Lord is not a hard task master, driving him on, expecting him to produce without any rest or refreshment. No, the Christian knows, as it says in Proverbs 12: 10, that "a righteous man regards the life of his animal...." But he has also come to know Jesus Christ the righteous is "gentle and humble of heart". He will find rest for his soul in Him. In our text, it says that Issachar knew how to lie down between two burdens; he saw that rest was good. Is this something that you are learning dear Christian? There are many burdens to bear in life and the Bible says, "Let every man bear his own burden. There is a burden that the Lord has specially designed for you to bear. How will you bear it? With grief or with joy in serving Jesus? Have you learned to take up the yoke that Jesus has given to you and not look for excuses as to why you cannot bear it? Have you learned to be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not vain in the Lord?"

Do you realize that on the last Day, that great day of judgment, that the Lord will reward you according to your work? You are to "labor for the food that does not perish; that food which will endure to eternal life." Do you labor hard at your job, and in your job do you labor hard also for the Lord's cause and kingdom by thinking of God's interests in regard to what you do and whether you are a help or a hindrance to people around you? Do you grow weary in your labors? Do you know that is good for you to come back to the Lord Jesus in prayer and ask Him to give you rest? Do you step aside to rest for awhile, and turn aside for a bit, to pray? Do spend time alone with the Lord so that you will be truly strengthened? Issachar saw that rest was good, and that the land was pleasant. This is how he was able to bow his shoulder to bear a burden, and became a band of slaves. He made God his strength. He saw his God as the One, the only One who could help him to bear the burdens of his soul. God was

the only one who could strengthen him; mind and body and soul. Do you know this dear Christian? Sometimes we go on for days and days and days, not coming to God to find rest for our soul. And is it any wonder that we are burned out and have nothing any longer to give to others or to God? Remember the words of Psalm 68: 19 where it says, "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits, the God of our salvation!" In the NAS it says, "Blessed be the Lord who daily bears our burden; the God Who is our Salvation." And Psalm 55: 22 it says, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved." And 1 Peter 5: 6 -"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." Christians are a band of brothers who have learned the value of work and the value of rest as Issachar did. They are a band of slaves to Jesus Christ their Master.

The 3rd Quality that God and Jacob consider desirable in a Christian is to be wise as a serpent in their spiritual battles. (Verses 16-18)

"Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel." "Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider shall fall backward." "I have waited for your salvation, O Lord!" I believe that these verses refer the fact that some of the descendants of the tribe of Dan would be very clever spiritual strategists. I am thinking especially of Samson who was of this tribe. God made him a judge in Israel. He was a man who did exploits for the Lord, single-handedly fighting battles against the enemies of the Lord, the Philistines. Samson was a man of great physical strength which was given to him by God so that he could judge and prevail over the enemies of Israel. But this amazing man was not very discerning concerning his personal relationships and the state of his own heart. Even so, in his strategies to win his battles for the Lord, he would learn, over time, to be wise as a serpent. The Lord would have to teach him how to be "as innocent as a dove." To have the two qualities together is a very desirable thing in a Christian.

First, he married a woman from Timnah who was a daughter of the Philistines. This would not seem to have been the right thing to do. It was not something that should be imitated; that any believer should be unequally yoked with an unbeliever. But turn with me to Judges 14. "Now Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines." "So he went up and told his father and mother saying, 'I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore get her for me as a wife.'" This is no doubt the wrong approach to courtship entirely. Young men, please do not do this with your parents! "Then his father and mother said to him, 'Is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?'"

"And Samson said to his father, 'Get her for me, for she pleases me well.'" Again, this was a presumptuous and rude way of going about to obtain something that was sacred. But now look at verse 4. "But his father and mother did not know that that it was of the Lord--that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines." "For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel."

The lesson that we should learn from Samson is that the Lord is seeking occasion through every Christian to move against sins in our society and in our own personal life as well. The Lord can and will work all things together for our good, but it is much to be hoped that we will make progress in holiness and bring glory to his name in the way that live. We will not do much good against sins in our society to change things if we cannot move against sins in our own life and heart. The Christian has been given great power from God to move against sin, but sometimes he is very clumsy and crude in the way that he goes about using that strength. But if he can just learn to manage and direct the great power and freedom which have been given to him in Christ, in Christ's having given him His Holy Spirit; then spiritual battles can be won. The Philistines that Sampson faced are a picture to us of sins that must be put to death in our own heart and life. On many occasions Samson put them to death, but sometimes he compromised with immorality, and played sad compromising games with the source of the great power of the Holy Spirit that had been given to him. If you will recall, this led to his hair being shorn, his eyes being put out, and his "becoming like any other man" in terms of what he could do.

You and I must be careful that we do not become like Sampson in this respect. We must learn to do what he finally did learn to do. He became "a serpent by the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider falls backward." He did this by taking the position and attitude of a serpent in regard to his own sinfulness. And he did this before he was able to successfully implement this same attitude toward the Philistines. Sin was like a rider coming down the road to get him and take away everything good from his life. It wanted to nullify all of his usefulness to God. But Sampson would cause this rider to fall backward. You will recall that after Samson had his hair cut by his harlot girlfriend that he lost his great strength. The Philistines took him and put out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza, and they bound him with bronze fetters, and he became a grinder in the prison." Here he had time to think about the way that he had compromised with the great privileges and power that he had been given.

It was good for Samson to learn to wait upon the Lord after these compromising failures which he had committed. I think that this is why, prophetically, that Jacob says in verse 18 of our text, "I have waited for your salvation, O Lord!" We, as Christians should never forget for one minute that

our strength, our help, our ability to do any good thing is from the Lord. He is our strength. He is our shield. He is our teacher in righteousness and holiness and truth. You recall that it was when Samson "waited" upon the Lord in this holy way that the Lord returned to help him and he was enabled to pull down the pillars of the great house of the Philistines and put them all to death. He died in the process. We should learn from this that it will take a serpent's attitude, on our part, toward sin to put it to death, and in the process, that a part of us will die in the fighting and struggling against it. We should be learning to hiss and to fight against sin. We must learn to strike at the rider Satan who comes against us to take away our strength, our victory, and our witness as Christians. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can give us this holy attitude and build into our life the grace and wisdom that it will take. We cry out to you, O Lord, "I have waited for your salvation." This is a good quality in a Christian; a viper toward sin, and dependent upon Christ for all strength.

The 4th set of Qualities that God and Jacob consider desirable in a Christian are perseverance, fruitfulness, and fair speech. (Verse 19)

I thought that I would lump these last 3 qualities together because each section addressed to each son is short. They all seem linked together and it will be a good way to tie everything that we have said thus far, together. Perseverance in living the life of faith and obedience to Christ and God's Word will bring fruitfulness at last, and beautiful words will come forth from the Christian's mouth and the mouths of others. Gad is the first in this progression, and of him it says, "a troop shall tramp upon him, but he shall triumph at last." Gad faced overwhelming forces coming against him but it says that he still overcame them at last. This is how it often is for the Christian in his spiritual warfare. In the life of faith, those who are trusting in God alone, Christ alone, and the Scriptures alone, do not see immediate and sustained victories in overcoming the World, the flesh, and the Devil in the first encounter. It is a long and protracted battle where we are tested by God in every point, but are led onward and upward. We must learn to wage war against sin and overcome the Evil one.

Temptations to sin will come, but they are not permitted by God in the life of His child so that they will ultimately fail, go back, and be destroyed by them. No, they are there so that the Christian will learn to put on the armor of God, take up the sword of the Spirit, and do battle; to fight the good fight of faith. If you have failed to overcome temptation to sin before, it does not mean that you have to continue to fail always. If you turn with me to Micah chapter 7 you will see this. Here in Chapter 7 Micah bemoans the fact in verse 2 that "the faithful man has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among men." They all lie in wait for blood, every man hunts his brother with a net." He finds

that as he looks around that there is no one that he can trust. Verse 7 says, "Therefore, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; My God will hear me." Then he says these precious words; "Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall I will arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me." "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case and executes justice for me." "He will bring me forth to the light; I will see His righteousness." The correct way of proceeding for the Christian is not to become frustrated and upset with ourselves and give up when we do not see victory right away. It is to persevere, to plod along, and to take everything a step at a time until we see, and more importantly God sees, what He is looking for in us.

How does this come to pass? It comes to pass, as it says in verse 20 of Asher, when we see the importance of the word of God. "Bread from Asher shall be rich," it says. If, as we have seen, the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit; it is also the bread of life. It is that by which we live, says Jesus when He was tempted by the Devil in the wilderness. "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God. It was by this means that He conquered. Why not you and I as well? Why not take up this sword; why not eat of this bread. It is by the rich bread of the Word of God that you and I will grow strong to do battle for our Lord and our King, Jesus Christ. Asher shall yield royal dainties; food fit for King Solomon.

The name Asher means "blessed" or "happy". If you want to be happy and blessed, you must take more seriously your commitment to the Word of God. You must have spiritual life in order to have spiritual strength. That life comes from Jesus Christ, the bread of life. And once you have spiritual life and strength, then you can wield the sword. And once you have learned to eat the bread and wield the sword then you will be like Naphtali; a deer let loose. You will speak words, beautiful words, like David did in 2 Samuel 22: 33 and following. "He make my feet like hind's feet and sets me on my high places. He teaches my hands to make war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze." "You have also given me the shield of Your salvation; Your gentleness has made me great." "You enlarge my path under me so my feet did not slip." "I have pursued my enemies and destroyed them; neither did I turn back again until they were destroyed." "And I have destroyed and wounded them, so that they could not rise." This, my brethren, is what you and I are called to do in relation to all of sins and all the schemes of the Devil. May God give each of us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.