

Faith in Mature Saints

Genesis 48-49

Ah, the foibles and follies of old age. A story appeared in an LA paper

An 82-year-old woman received a \$114 ticket for taking too long to cross a street. Mayvis Coyle said she began shuffling with her cane across Foothill Boulevard in the San Fernando Valley when the light was green, but was unable to make it to the other side before it turned red.



She said the motorcycle officer who ticketed her on Feb. 15 told her she was obstructing traffic. "I think it's completely outrageous," said Coyle, who described herself as a Cherokee medicine woman. "He treated me like a 6-year-old, like I don't know what I'm doing."

Los Angeles police Sgt. Mike Zabolski of the Valley Traffic Division said police are cracking down on people who improperly cross streets because pedestrian accidents are above normal. He said he could not comment on Coyle's ticket other than to say that it is her word against that of the citing officer, identified only as Officer Kelly.

Councilwoman Wendy Greuel said she has asked transportation officials to figure out how to accommodate elderly people. "We should look at those areas with predominantly seniors and accommodate their needs in intersections" she said.

What a challenge the decline and difficulties of growing old can be. We face the declining years and find ourselves wondering over life. Many struggle with an unfulfilled life – dreams and hopes and expectations withering away. Many struggle with the bitterness the accompanies loss, loneliness and pain. The problems of the past are magnified. The mistakes in life and replayed with vain regret. None of us wants to become a soured saint.

But, what an example a seasoned and stable faith is in the midst of such challenges. When men and women age with grace, they see God ever more, not just in the world they are coming to but also in the world they are leaving. The Bible is richer, God's truth is more contoured, hardships are accepted and even triumphed in. This is what we all want to aim for, to become a seasoned saint.

As we come to the end of Jacob's life, we've seen how he seems to have struggled with the long hardships of his life and its seeming shortness (even at 130 years old). At a time God has resolved so many of his griefs, he seems to find so little to be glad about. Yet, Moses highlights how in the midst of this, a great blessing is conveyed that was visible even to their day. You see, there is no tribe of Joseph. Among the sons of Jacob who became the tribes of Israel, there is no Joseph. What happened? This text is about what happened. And gloriously, even Jacob begins to show evidence of faith as a mature saint.

Acknowledges the Promises of God**(v.1-7)**

Joseph is informed that his father is very ill and is expected to die. So Joseph gathers up his two sons and comes to his father's home. He waits outside while a servant quietly rouses the old man and tells Joseph is there with two boys. As any father would, he rouses himself and sits up, pulling up his covers and shifting his pillows to be able to sit comfortably and lean on his staff. So Joseph enters to stand by his father's bed. Jacob looks at them and then begins to exalt the God who has provided for him.

Jacob's present faith in God recognizes the past promises of God.

In the Word from God**(v.3-4)**

God had spoken to Jacob. In a time where there was no written scripture, this was large in the life of the early Old Testament saints. God had given His Word to Jacob. This Word was true and to be believed. In believing it, it was to be acted on as well.

God had confirmed the covenant to Jacob. But in the context of Joseph standing at his bedside, he focuses on the promise of being fruitful and multiplying. In His Word to Jacob, God had affirmed His covenant promise to enlarge his family and bring forth a vast multitude of descendants that would become a great nation. They are on the threshold of the first phase of that promise's fulfillment.

In the Kindness of Grace**(v.5-6)**

Then, in a startling act of kindness and grace arising from faith in God's Word, Jacob speaks his own promise to Joseph. Rather than pass on the inheritance to Joseph, he would magnify Joseph's standing by adopting his two sons and then giving each of them a portion among all the brothers. The effect of this is to give Joseph a double portion. But he must be willing to give them up and have them named as Jacob's sons. The rest of Joseph's children fathered after these two boys will be Joseph's own sons in his own name.

In the Midst of Grief**(v.7)**

Why does he do this? Because he sees the sons of Joseph as the unexpected provision of God in the midst of a long sadness. Jacob, after all these years, still has an empty place in his heart that Rachel occupied. In the way he phrases this, he sees her as dying while there was still a way to go. He wanted so much for more children by her. But God took her. And now he sees that Joseph's boys can become the rest of the sons that Rachel never could have.

How often will Israel's hopes be dashed like Jacob's on the way to Bethlehem! There will be dark years of trial, testing and hardship. There will be times when it will seem so hard to see that boy that one day will be born in Bethlehem of Ephrath. But faith clings strong to God's promises and even in the dimming eyesight of old age, the heart sees clearly what God has said. Is it no wonder then that two old people, Simeon and Anna, will rejoice with long and patient waiting faith to see the boy in Bethlehem born.

Acknowledges the Purposes of God (v.8-20)

The faith of mature saints acts in acknowledge the purposes of God. Jacob's eyes may see the world around him dimly, but his heart sees the heaven above so clearly.

By His Adoption of the Boys (v.8-14)

From the promise to adopt, we now move to the ceremony of adoption itself.

Note first the shift in Jacob's name. He is not in this Jacob the schemer. He is Israel who strives or engages with God and prevails. So these two boys are going to become a part, not just of Jacob's family, but also of Israel. They will be enumerated among the tribes.

The adoption ceremony opens with the father asking for the identity of the sons. Because his eyesight is poor, he is confirming the identity of these boys. After all, he has to have plucking on the hem of his conscience that he took advantage of his father's own blindness to gain the inheritance. So the "Who are these?" is like in a wedding ceremony, "Who presents this woman to be married?" It is a formal and ceremonial identification of the person and their family.

Joseph responds with the confirmation of who they are and a ceremonial presentation of them for adoption. "These are my sons. They are God's gift to me." These are the fruit of the covenant God gave to Jacob. These are not Joseph's to do as he pleases. Both Jacob and Joseph are recognizing the purpose of God to bless Joseph even as his dreams had foretold.

Jacob calls them forward to name them as his own sons by the blessing he conveys upon them. He kisses them and hugs them and peers with dimness and delight into their faces. What a wonderful sentence this is. Jacob's sad heart moves toward hope. "I never thought I'd see your face again and now God has allowed me to see the faces of your sons."

Joseph sets the boys down and bows to the earth acknowledging the purposes of God in the adoption of his sons. He stands them formally before Israel so that they can be blessed. Knowing his father's blindness and possibly lack of familiarity with the boys, he strategically places them with Manasseh on Jacob's right and Ephraim on his left. Manasseh is his oldest and therefore should be under the right hand of prominence in receiving the blessing from Jacob. Again, this is not manipulation but careful attention to detail knowing the circumstances of his father's failing eyesight.

But then, in a startling move, Jacob leans toward the boys and crosses his hands. His right hand now is on the head of Ephraim and his left on the head of Manasseh. He knows on whom the main blessing should rest. Just as he, the younger, had been given the blessing over the elder, so he intended and determined to do so with Joseph's sons.

By His Blessing on the Son**(v.15-16)**

Then he blesses Joseph. I love this! Can you see the scene in your mind's eye? See Jacob, old, infirm, weak, ill with eyes looking off into eternity. See two young boys standing at his bedside, their father behind them. See Jacob's arms crossed with his hands on their heads. And hear the blessing of Joseph by Jacob upon these two adopted sons.

In the blessing, Jacob invokes God in three significant ways.

- *HE IS THE GOD BEFORE WHOM HIS ANCESTORS WALKED.* Here is their history with God. Here are covenant promises from God and covenant accountability to Him. He is the God whose purposes and promises are larger than the immediate blessing. He is the God whose purposes are larger than any of them can know.
- *HE IS THE GOD WHO HAS SHEPHERDED JACOB HIS WHOLE LIFE LONG.* This is richer than it seems. Here is a shepherd who sees God as his shepherd in all the richness of what it would have meant to him. God has been his guard and guide, his protector and provider, all his days. Even when he is struggling with sin and its consequences, God has been with him and has brought him safely to this place of blessing. And God is shepherding even in the details of this blessing.
- *HE IS THE ANGEL WHO HAS REDEEMED JACOB FROM EVIL.* Here is wonderful double meaning. He uses a word that at one level means that God has delivered from the evils around him. But the word also means that God has delivered from the evil he is and does. God is deliverer and redeemer. The reference to God as this redeeming angel points back to specific times in his life where the angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ, had appeared to him. And it points forward to the coming redeemer who delivers all of God's people from their sins.

In the blessing, Jacob invokes the covenant in two significant ways.

- *MAY THEY BE BLESSED IN THE PERPETUATING OF THE FAMILY NAME.* Through these boys the purpose of God to magnify Himself by extending their fame and reputation would unfold. Not just through them alone, but certainly through them as well, the covenant blessing would be extended.
- *MAY THEY BE BLESSED IN THE GROWING INTO A GREAT MULTITUDE.* While the covenant sees all the sons of Abraham as becoming a great nation and a greater multitude, Jacob's blessing invokes that for these two sons and their descendents. Over the long years, this blessing unfolds as Ephraim becomes the largest and wealthiest of what would be the northern tribes.

By His Elevation of the Younger (v.17-20)

Then Joseph notices the placing of the hands. He is upset. Jacob, in spite of his care, has gotten it wrong. “Here Dad, your hands are crossed and the right hand is on the wrong boy. Here let me help you.” And he reaches out to switch Jacob’s hands.

O, but by faith, Jacob has discerned the purposes and patterns of God’s ways. He knows that he has reversed his hands. He has done it on purpose. Don’t move them. Leave them as they are. This is God’s way. This is God’s purpose.

You see, down through the Bible God has purposed in his ways to elevate the younger over the elder. We have seen this in Genesis with Seth over Cain. Isaac is the true son over Ishmael the older. Jacob is the chosen over Eau the elder. David the second regent will establish his line over Saul, the first. David the youngest of his brothers will become the king. The New Covenant is established as the Old Covenants are fulfilled, fade and now, finished. The first heavens and the first earth will be ended and righteousness will flourish in the new heavens and the new earth. This is the way of God and purpose of God.

It is like this so that God may frustrate the wisdom and the way of the world.

So Israel will one day turn this surprising blessing into its invocation. The Irish are famous for their wry and witty blessings. We have lost much in that we do not know how to give and less how receive blessing words. But among the Israelites and among the people of God this will become an illustration of faith, an invocation of blessing and an invitation to the covenant. “May God make you as Ephraim and Manasseh.”

Acknowledges the Providences of God (v.21-22)

The faith of a mature saint also acknowledges the good providences of God. It sees behind the veil of outward circumstances the hidden but powerfully working hand of God. So Jacob’s future blessing for Joseph and his tribes rests in God’s kind providences.

With the Presence of the Lord (v.21)

There is no sweeter place to rest in the last days of life than in the assurance of God’s presence and God’s promises. Yes, Jacob is about to die. But all that He has hoped in and banked on does not flicker out in the twilight of his life. No, it is bright flame that is passed on with deep assurance to his son. God will be with Joseph and his people just as He has been with Jacob all these long years and in these last moments. The past promises of God that have sustained Jacob also assure Joseph that they will return to the land promised them.

With the Present of the Land (v.22)

Jacob acknowledges the providences of God in the victories he has won and the land he has gained. In a play on the word Shechem, Jacob bequeaths to Joseph this mountain slope town and district which he has fought for and won by war. So Joseph and later, Israel, are hereby warned that the promises of God that bring

them surely back to the land will necessitate the sword and bow under the providences of God. They will have won the land they have been promised.

Why have we talked today about Jacob's actions here arising from faith? How can we say that his is the faith of a mature saint? Because Hebrews 11:21 says, "By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff." Jacob's blessing is by faith. He is acting on what he knows to be true. He knows the promises, purposes and providences of God through the Word. And this is an act of worship. This leaning on his staff and adopting Joseph's boys as an act of blessing Joseph all because of believing God in an obeying way. **Lessons**

May God cause us, in the twilight of life, to be men and women whose gentleness, sweetness and faith magnify our great God. May we speak much of His great promises that He has fulfilled and others that we are eagerly awaiting. May we speak much of His great purposes, some of which counter the wisdom of the world and thus cause us to delight in His intricate and surprising ways. May we speak much of His providences, His hand on our lives. May we help others to be blessed by our words and ways. May we help others to arrive home with gracious and godly dignity.

We are like Ephraim and Manasseh. We have been brought into God's spiritual family as heirs, not in the place of another, but because of Another. Like Joseph, Jesus is magnified by the untold multiplication of honor that comes when all the saints are named as His joint-heirs. In the vast and limitless wealth of God, Jesus is not receiving less because of this and His honor is ever the greater. Thus, God's love for us His children is primarily about making much of Christ.

As I close this morning, as recipients of the new, the greater and magnificent in the surprising purposes of God, *may God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.*