

Two years ago... In an interview with Esquire Magazine... former Beatles star Paul McCartney... (at that time... aged 75 years old)... was asked if he felt that he still had something to prove. ... McCartney responded:

“Yeah, all the time. And it is a silly feeling. And I do actually sometimes talk to myself and say, ‘Wait a minute: look at this little mountain of achievements. There’s an awful lot of them. Isn’t that enough?’ But maybe I could do it a bit better. Maybe I could write something that’s just more relevant or new. And that always drags you forward. I mean, I never felt like, “Oh, I did good.” Nobody does. Even at the height of the Beatles. I prefer to think there’s something I’m not doing quite right, so I’m constantly working on it. I always was, we always were. I mean, look at John [Lennon], a mass of paranoia and worries about whether he’s doing it right. You only have to listen to his lyrics. I think that’s just artists in general.”

When we look at someone like Paul McCartney or John Lennon... we might think that they have done enough to sit back and rest on their laurels. ... If you are like me... it shocks us to see that people like them (who have achieved a lot of fame and status)... are still driven to gain more. Even at the age of 75... Paul McCartney need to build on the incredible amount of status that he already has. (It is never enough.)

Can you imagine living the sunset years of your life with the constant craving to be seen by others as better? *“People do not see me the way that I want them to, yet... My reputation should be even better. The status that I have does not yet satisfy me.”*

Today our passage in Genesis presents a very different story... of a person who comes to the end of their life. ... Jacob rejects status... in favor of grace-focused living.

You know... something dawned on me this week as I studied Genesis 48... that I had never thought about before. ... And it is this: A life that is

focused on status... is the polar opposite of a life that is focused on grace. You cannot be a grace-oriented person... while at the same time... be concerned about your status... (It is one or the other.)

In our passage today... we will see this contrast. A life that is oriented toward status is far less rewarding... It is fleeting... (it does not satisfy.) But a life that is grace-oriented... is focused on God's will... and in particular... His shepherding us.

It is important for us to recognize this... because every one of us needs to perpetually ask ourselves "*why am I doing this?*" (You see... there is so much that we may be doing – IN THE CHURCH (supposedly... for the Lord)... but may... in fact... be more of a pursuit of status. ... "*I will attend these events... or I will give leadership to that area of ministry... because it elevates my sense of value*" ... (to myself and in the eyes of others.) I struggle with this... and I sense many of you may (as well.)

HOWEVER(!)... I Corinthians 3:12 calls every one of those efforts "*Wood, hay, and straw...*" ... I Corinthians 3 is about our motive... and it says that things done from a motive for our status... will all be burned up. We won't have any reward from God... with regard to those activities... in eternity.

So the benefit of our passage today... (what I am praying for you and I)... is that it will bring us to one of these necessary evaluations... about our involvement in God's work... (*and about our life in general*.) ... I don't care how old your are... Are you grace-focused...? Or are you status-concerned...? Being grace-focused (trusting God's shepherding our life)... is the antidote to being status-conscious.

As I said earlier... death quickly approached Jacob. And as it did... old Jacob's soul rose above his prosperity and material existence in Egypt... to an exercise of faith that was so extraordinary... that (what is in our passage today) gets singled out... and cited in the New Testament's "*Hall of Faith*" (Hebrews 11.) It was selected in this exemplary chapter as the singular event that characterized Jacob as a man of faith.

Hebrews 11:21 (ESV)

By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.

This extraordinary act of faith is the subject of our passage today. ... You might think... "*What is so extraordinary about a father asking God to bless his favorite son's two boys?*" Wasn't an even greater act of faith... the way he behaved in last week's passage before Pharaoh? Remember how he walked into the court of the world's most powerful man and basically said, "*You (Pharaoh) have power over the earth... but the power that I possess is over the heavens...*" Jacob walked up and blessed Pharaoh. (The greater always blesses the lesser.) ... So why is Jacob blessing his two grandsons held up as the greatest example of Jacob's strong faith?

To be honest... I don't have an answer to show that the events of today's passage are greater than the events of last week's... but I do intend to show you that today's events show an incredible amount of faith. It is a faith that rose out of turning away from status-consciousness to a grace-oriented life.

Our verses of study concern themselves with Jacob blessing Joseph's sons (Ephraim and Manasseh.) It comes to us in two parts. The first is that Jacob blessed them by formally adopting them as his own.

Genesis 48:1-7

Joseph came to his dying father with his two half-Egyptian sons. Bringing these two fully-cultured Egyptian boys was that they might personally identify themselves with God's people. ... Now stop for a moment and think! ... Such identification with a *shepherd* clan (and please remember... shepherds were **detested** by the Egyptians) would ultimately shut them off from Egyptian **prominent** society.

They are at least 17 years old... because Jacob has been in Egypt for 17 years... and they had already been born when Jacob arrived. ... So... for at least 17 years these boys have been raised in the most prestigious Egyptian schools and according to the most privileged Egyptian benefits. Joseph was the number two man in all of Egypt... and their mother came from the most respected family heritage of Egypt. ... No doubt they have experienced the best that their culture had to offer. They had very high status... in the most advantaged culture of the world.

Joseph... Ephraim... and Manasseh entered the bedroom and gazed on the revered old shepherd. ... Jacob's heart was full. His favorite son and two grandsons (Ephraim and Manasseh) were there... dressed no doubt like the young Egyptian nobles that they were. Their appearance and mannerisms (no doubt) would have been more Egyptian than Hebrew.

You and I might have had our doubts. *"They are not going to want what I am about to give them. Look what they already have. What I offer to them is **downward** mobility..."* ... Of course... we don't know what Ephraim and Manasseh were thinking... but we **do know** that this was **not** what **Jacob** thought! ... Jacob's faith knew different. What the old shepherd had

to offer... was indeed much better – he had no doubt of that! Read with me again verses 3-4.

Genesis 48:3-4

God had appeared *to* Jacob **twice**... Once was after his own deception of Isaac... with the wrath of Esau still ringing in his ears. The other time was after the disaster at Shechem (when his sons murdered the men of the whole city)... so he had the wrath of all Canaan ringing in his ears. Neither of these were proud moments in Jacob's life. They were both very low times. ... But at both times... God had reconfirmed to Jacob His promises to Abraham and Isaac. ... That sure is grace... isn't it?

You know why I think Ephraim and Manasseh's status did not even cross Jacob's mind...? His mind was filled with God's grace! Filling your mind with evidence of God's grace will do that. It will make you unconscious of status. Status and grace are mutually exclusive to each other. You are either living in the atmosphere of one or the other.

Jacob knows that what he has... is far better than what these two young Egyptian aristocrats have. ... He wants to adopt them... so he can give to them a double portion of what he is giving to each of his other sons.

The Hebrew wording of verse 5 is literally "Like Reuben and Simeon they will be to me." Jacob adopts them (not only) to stand on equal footing with their uncles (Jacob's own twelve sons)... but to become sons ONE and TWO... (replacing Reuben and Simeon.)

We have to go to 1st Chronicles 5:1 to see the reason for this. So let's briefly do that.

1 Chronicles 5:1 (ESV)

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 could not be enrolled as the oldest son;

We saw at the end of Genesis 35... that Reuben tried to seize his father Jacob's headship of the family. He sent a cultural message to everyone that he was the new head of the family by taking one of Jacob's wives... as his own. Now... Simeon led the murderous slaughter of the men of Shechem... back in Genesis 34... so he too was replaced. Ephraim and Manasseh displaced Reuben and Simeon as "Son 1"... and "Son 2."

By the time we get to verse 7... it would appear that Ol' Jacob begins to digress from what he is doing (in adopting these two boys.) He suddenly starts talking about his favorite wife Rachael and how she died too soon.

Genesis 48:7

Some commentaries actually say that Jacobs shows an aged mind that has trouble staying on the subject at hand. But this is not the case.

Jacob was saying that... (if it were up to him)... his choice would have been to give his GREAT inheritance to more children that came from these boy's grandmother (Rachael.) And now he has a way that he can!

Jacob legitimates the adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh on the basis of the premature demise of Rachel. Rachel had not borne enough sons before her premature death.

Jacob's mind is so focused on grace...! Indeed it brought so much grief to Jacob when Rachel died. But (even so) God has provided a yearning that Jacob had... concerning his beloved. These boys are Rachael's

descendants and will have more of the great inheritance than any of Jacob's other boys.

When our life is grace-focused we can see God's hand of blessing. But when we are status-conscious... all we can see is how we have been slighted. *"I surely deserve better..." ... "People just do not esteem me high enough." ... "I don't get any respect." ...* But Jacob was seeing God's blessing.

And now that Jacob has expressed his reasons for adopting these boys... (as his and Rachael's sons)... our text takes us right into the formal procedure of him doing just that.

Genesis 48:8-9

Once again... I believe that many of the commentaries miss it here. They say that Jacob did not recognize who Joseph's sons were... because he had poor eyesight. I guess what they want us to think... is that they had been standing in Jacob's presence next to their father (as young Egyptian nobles) while Jacob talks about them... and then the wandering ol' mind of the aged Jacob suddenly becomes lucid and notices them... but he cannot figure out who these young Egyptian nobles with Joseph are. ... Uh!... I don't think that is the case.

More than one historical resource that I read... points to a cultural factor. *"Who are these?"* is not indication of Jacob's blindness but the initiation of the ceremony... just as in modern-day weddings when... near the beginning... the minister may ask... *"Who gives this woman to be married to this man?"* The ceremonial response... *"Her mother and I do"* is also paralleled in Joseph's ceremonial response in verse 9. *"The sons were*

given by God, and they are the very ones born in Egypt..." And so the formal adoption ceremony began as they came close to Jacob. Verse 12 continues the ceremony... but first... two things need to be addressed.

Genesis 48:10-11

Instead of blind ol' Jacob approaching the boys (which I guess was the normal custom)... Joseph had to bring his sons near to Jacob. ... And then Jacob broke down... before he could continue with the ritual.

When Joseph became a slave... Jacob thought Joseph was dead and wept in despair (37:34). ... But eventually God's plan allowed Jacob to regain not only his son... but his grandchildren as well. ... (LISTEN!)... A focus on God's grace reminds us that *circumstances are never so bad*... that they are ever *beyond* God's help. ... [P A U S E] ... When we belong to a loving God... we simply don't know (yet) what good He may bring out of a seemingly hopeless situation.

Genesis 48:12

In willfully giving his sons to his father to be adopted... Joseph shows his own faith in the promised inheritance to Abraham... Isaac... and Jacob. It is far better than all the Egyptian privilege and status that they currently had. ... And now that the formality of adoption has been completed... there was the other formality to accomplish – the official blessing and bestowing of their great inheritance.

Genesis 48:13-14

Here the drama intensifies as we follow every movement. ... Joseph's positioning of his sons made it convenient for his nearly blind father to

place his right hand (the hand symbolic of action and power)... on the head of the firstborn Manasseh... and his left hand on Ephraim's head. The immense importance that this had for Joseph... is seen in the precision of the language... with the repeated use of "right" and "left" seven times in verse 13 and 14.

This placement of the sons fits the cultural expectation of the prominence of the firstborn son. ... However... Jacob (we are about to see) purposefully avoids Joseph's action... and he crossed his hands... placing his right hand on the younger son Ephraim... and his left hand on the older son Manasseh. Then Jacob continued...

Genesis 48:15-16

Jacob spoke of God as his shepherd throughout his life. God had not failed to care for Jacob. Jacob had indeed failed God... but God is faithful and did not ever fail Jacob. (Grace!!!)

When you and I see God as our Great Shepherd Who has never failed us in His leading... whatever status we have... brings contentment. To be grace-oriented means that we see God as the Good Shepherd that He is... and to trust in His provision and care. A mind that is filled with thoughts of God's grace... and a mind that yearns for greater status... are polar opposites. Grace is the antidote to status-consciousness.

Jacob is blessing Ephraim and Manasseh by putting them under the care of God... (Who shepherds us)... and under his Angel... Who delivers us from evil by crippling us - whenever He needs to - in order to make us depend on God (and not our own strength.) That is exactly what The Angel of the

Lord did to Jacob. He crippled Jacob just before he met Esau to make Jacob see his need to depend on God. Depending on God (and not himself) is what redeemed Jacob - spiritually. It is what redeems us... as well.

But all of a sudden Joseph interrupts his father... and a dispute occurred about the proper social expectation.

Genesis 48:17-20

Joseph was appalled. His father had transgressed every tradition from the Nile to the Euphrates. ... All Manasseh's years had been lived with the privilege and expectation of being the firstborn son. ... Joseph had worked to instill firstborn character and the necessary sense of responsibility in Manasseh. This humiliation would be an undeserved wound to him. Why had the old man crossed his hands?

So a dispute occurred between Joseph and Jacob... but the dispute did not last long... because Joseph quickly and wisely complied. ... Joseph realized that Jacob was blessing by Divine inspiration. ... We see here It is a good illustration of yielding to the will of God... though you had years and years of a different expectation.

Joseph... being (understandably) agitated by his father's action... cried: "*Not so!*" ... "*Not so my father: for this is the firstborn; put your right hand upon this boy's head.*" ... He thought Jacob's shortsightedness accounted for his action.

However... Jacob knew what he was doing. "*I know it, my son, I know it,*" he said. ... So Jacob's faith overcame *the will of man* (which was based on cultural norms... and years of normal expectation.) Jacob blessed them saying... both will be great... but the younger will be greater than the older son.

That was not just the stubbornness of an old man... used to having his own way. ... It was not a personal preference... but a prophetic pronouncement.

In the future... whenever one Jew wanted to bless another Jew... a common phrase was: "May God make you as Ephraim and Manasseh!" These were Israel's two largest tribes. They were given the two largest territories of the promised land.

Jacob was a true prophet! ... Accordingly Ephraim certainly became the greater of the two tribes. Ephraim became so dominant that... after the ten tribes broke away to set up its rival kingdom... it was Jeroboam... an Ephraimite... who led the rebellion (1 Kings 11:26). As time wore on... all ten tribes of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) was simply known as "Ephraim."

It had taken Jacob a lifetime of divine discipline to learn that he must only speak and do the word of God. ... Now he dared to trust God... and believe God's plans were best... even if they go against the tide of social norms.

Grace orientation is consumed with being obedient to God's revealed will. Status-consciousness is imprisoned by social norms. (It cannot recognize God's will... if it goes against social expectations.) ... Now... Jacob loved his son Joseph... but he even went against his beloved son's wishes to do God's will. Fortunately Joseph (knowing a lot about God's grace) quickly

submitted to it... as well. I can see why Hebrews 11 hold this act up so high... as an act of faith. ... Are **you** willing to break social expectations... and the expectations of a loved one... to follow God's will...? Your relationships may suffer and people will think you are NUTS!!!

There are so many lessons for us (here) about grace. ... Grace is totally at God's discretion. ... We love grace when it is applied to us in forgiveness. But... (our dirty little secret is) that we **don't** like it... when we see it applied to someone else who appears favored over us. ... “*Why didn't I get that measure of your grace, Lord...?*” ... [P A U S E] ... Yet... the only way for us to have the benefits of grace in forgiveness... is to have grace manifested toward us... as totally at God's Own discretion.

The crossed hands of blessing tell us that grace typically surprises.

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 (ESV)

²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

This is what makes the gospel so wild and wonderful. Because no one is beyond God's grace. ... The proudest...most vicious... meanest man in town... can (and often does)... find grace. ... There is a wildness to God's mercy!

And when it comes to living a life of faith... the crossed hands of blessing... need to provide you and I with some essential wisdom.

Wouldn't you agree that there have been many times over the years... that we have put forward some cherished desire... to God's right hand... and are displeased (like Joseph)... that He crossed His hands... and we end up with something else...? ... Has that ever happened to you...?

In times like that we may think... Perhaps God does not know the severity of the situation... .. But He answers: "*I know it, My son, I know it.*" ... It is not because He does not understand (or regard) our need. ... He sometimes refuses to gratify our whole desire... or He pours upon us blessings that are different than our most earnest longing. But with the grace that He gives us... we must see Him as our loving Shepherd... Who knows what is best for us.

Jacob knew that Joseph shared his strong faith. He knew that Joseph would not be clinging to his Egyptian status. So Jacob gifts Joseph with a parcel in the promised land.

Genesis 48:21-22

Genesis 48 gives a remarkable portrait of an old man who took full charge of his own death. His faith on his deathbed was the singular triumph of his life. He got this way... by being grace-focused.

How about you...? Do you purposefully have your mind sweep through the years... and like a magnet that attracts iron particles when it sweeps through sand... find evidences of God's grace...? Being grace-oriented is the antidote... for being status-conscious.