

56. The Blessing of the Almighty (2007)

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bible reading, and you'll find that in the book of Genesis in our Bibles. If you have one of the church Bibles, it's page 41, but whatever Bible you have, it's very near the beginning.

Genesis, this great book of beginnings, and we're getting really now very near the end of the beginnings. And we're going to read this moving story in Genesis chapter 48.

We read last time of Joseph's blessing of his people, Israel, in Egypt, saving them from the famine. And also blessing, extending to all the people of Egypt and to the Pharaoh of Egypt, that God's people being among the Egyptians brought saving and blessing to them.

And the chapter ended, you remember, with Israel, Jacob, knowing that he was near the end of his life. And just the very last line of chapter 47, then Israel bowed himself on the head of his staff.

His staff is how the footnote translates it, and the New Testament translates it. Israel bowed himself on the head of his staff. After this, Joseph was told, Behold, your father is ill.

[1 : 2 6] So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Notice the order. And it was told to Jacob, Your son Joseph has come to you.

Then Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed. And Jacob said, or Jacob had said to Joseph, God Almighty, El Shaddai, appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me.

And he said, Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you. I will make of you a company of peoples. And I will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.

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 are.

And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. 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.

[2 : 3 8] And I buried her there on the way to Ephrath, that is Bethlehem. When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, Who are these? Joseph said to his father, They are my sons, whom God has given me here.

And he said, Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them. Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. So Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them.

And Israel said to Joseph, I never expected to see your face. And behold, God has let me see your offspring also. Then Joseph removed them from his knees.

I don't think they could really have been sitting on Jacob's knees. These are young men about the age of 20 now, but it's a formal process that's going on here. So likely they were kneeling down by the knees of Jacob to signify that they were his sons.

Joseph removed them from the knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand towards Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand towards Israel's right hand.

[3 : 54] And he brought them near him. But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the firstborn.

And he blessed Joseph and said, The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless these boys.

And in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac. And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.

Or to be like fish, as the footnote says, for a multitude. When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head.

Joseph said to his father, Not this way, my father, since this one is the firstborn. Put your hand on his head. But his father refused and said, I know, my son, I know.

[5 : 09] He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations.

So he blessed them that day, saying, By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying, God make you as Ephraim and Manasseh. Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.

Then Israel said to Joseph, Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and will bring you again to the land of your fathers.

Moreover, I have given to you, rather than to your brothers, one mountain slope, or one place, Shechem, that I took from the hands of the Amorites with my sword, and with my bow.

Amen. And may God bless to us this, his word. Well, let's turn, shall we, to Genesis chapter 48.

[6 : 28] A chapter all about the blessing of God Almighty. My uncle, George Philip, begins his notes on this chapter saying this, There's always a great deal to learn by the bedside of dying saints, because they're too near eternity to be interested in anything but the truth.

And you might add, and anything but the most important of matters. Perhaps especially family matters. And that's certainly so here in Jacob's deathbed scene, where he's taken up in this chapter and the next, with matters of momentous importance for his own family, and indeed for the whole world.

We're seeing here, aren't we, the zenith of Jacob's faith. That's certainly what's singled out for us in Hebrews 11, verse 21.

By faith, Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship on the head of his staff. He's old.

He knows he's near death. We saw that last week in chapter 47. And so he's only concerned with the weightiest matters of life and of eternity.

[7 : 49] So what are his great concerns? What will his last words be all about? What is the chief concern that he wants to pass on to his sons and his grandsons by way of his legacy?

Well, I think you see it there in verse 3, loud and clear. He's determined, isn't he, to explain his whole life in terms of God.

El Shaddai, God Almighty, or the all-sufficient God, the great covenant God. And to explain his life in terms of the blessing of God Almighty, which had been his all through the days of his life, and which he coveted above and beyond all other things for his beloved family.

El Shaddai, verse 3, appeared to me. And that explains everything. Everything of truth and of moment about my life. There was nothing in Jacob's own life to wax eloquent about.

Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life. That's what he told Pharaoh in chapter 47. But the blessing of God Almighty, El Shaddai, the all-sufficient God of promise, found me.

[9 : 16] And that changed everything. He buried my past and he gave me a future. And it's that blessing above all earthly treasure that is the greatest legacy that this man can pass on to his family.

Indeed, it's the greatest legacy any man can pass on to his family and to all that he loves and cares for, body and soul. We're always warned, aren't we, these days, not to die intestate, not to die without a will.

It makes all sorts of complications because you haven't testified clearly what it is that you want to pass on to others. Well, Christians must not die intestate.

Indeed, we mustn't live intestately, if that's a word. We mustn't live without pointing others to the most important legacy of our life, the knowledge of the blessing of God Almighty and the way to share in that abundant, life-changing promise.

So let's look at Jacob's deathbed testimony and see what it is he was determined to pass on. The chapter, I think, really divides into two main sections. Verses 1 to 12 describe the formal adoption of Joseph's sons.

[10 : 40] And then verses 13 to 20 narrate the blessing that he then gives them. And then we have in verse 21 and 22 a rather moving little epilogue. So look first at verses 1 to 12 where Jacob's concern is above all to bequeath to Joseph's sons a precious birthright.

A precious birthright, a secure home among the people of God, the God who is all-sufficient, the God whose promise transcends all earthly possessions in Egypt and transcends all the pain of our mortality.

Verse 1 tells us that Joseph was informed about his father's illness and so immediately he senses that the end is near and he goes to see him. That's natural. But we're told specifically that he takes his two sons with him.

And in verse 2, it seems that Jacob was expecting this because he summons his strength and he's set up to address them formally. So what's going on? Well, here's Joseph.

Remember, the grand vizier of Egypt, the greatest power in all the land under Pharaoh and his power had never been greater, nor his wealth, than what we'd seen after the end of chapter 47.

[12 : 00] He shared with Pharaoh almost absolute power and wealth over the whole known world. He had hoovered up all the resources of the earth. What on earth can a poor, dying old shepherd offer to these sons of Joseph who must have been heirs to great wealth, to high life, to high position in Egypt?

Well, verses 3 to 7 explain. Probably verse 3 should read that now Jacob had said to Joseph because verses 3 to 7 rather interrupt the action as a parenthesis.

If you read verse 2 right on to verse 8, it makes perfect sense. But the point is that these verses are explaining what's going on here. Tell us that Jacob can offer something to Joseph, sons, that not even he, Joseph, the grand vizier of Egypt, can offer.

Joseph may be great in the world and indeed he may even be great in God's eyes and he was. But Joseph is not the patriarch.

For all his dreams, for all his faithfulness to God and the way he lived, God had never appeared to Joseph in the way he did to Jacob and to Isaac and to Abraham.

[13 : 29] And he'd never bestowed upon him the great covenant promise given to the chosen seed in every generation of the patriarchs. Only to Jacob had El Shaddai appeared in person.

El Shaddai, God Almighty or the all-sufficient God is usually the translation, but he is the God of promise. And the name El Shaddai is always used in connection with the promise, the promise of descendants.

He is the God who is able to make the barren fruitful. He's the God who is able to fulfill his promise despite all obstacles to it.

And he had promised this inheritance to Jacob, not to Esau, but to Jacob. Verse 4. And Jacob, of course, had rightly desired that birthright.

But he had sought it, hadn't he, deceitfully from his own father. But now he desired above all else to pass on that birthright that was his. And he proposes to formally adopt Joseph's two sons to be his own so that they will be equal sharers of this blessing along with all the other sons of Jacob as full sons of Israel.

[14 : 54] That's what verses 5 and 6 are saying. They'll not just be grandsons but they will be legal sons and heirs by adoption by Israel himself.

Remember that these boys had a pagan mother, an Egyptian mother, the daughter of the high priest of On. But there's not going to be any question of them having second tier status in this family.

They'll have a secure home as equals among the patriarchs of Israel. They'll each have a tribe named after them. And in fact, they're also above that, they're inheriting the birthright of the firstborn which Reuben, Jacob's real firstborn, had forfeited because of his sin against Jacob.

If you read 1 Chronicles 5 verse 1 later on, you'll see that that's explicitly said there. So these half-Egyptian sons of Joseph are inheriting a double portion, the birthright of the firstborn to become Jacob's own seed.

Isn't that extraordinary? Well, it is an extraordinary thing. And yet, it shouldn't really surprise us to find this buried almost here in obscure pages in the Old Testament.

[16 : 09] It's just another one of those wonderful hints about what the whole story of the Bible is all about. Because El Shaddai, the covenant God, is a God who loves adoption.

The whole purpose in his story of redemption is that he should be the great adopter. When the fullness of the time had come, says Paul, God sent forth his son to redeem, so that we should receive, what?

Adoption as sons. So that we, who didn't even have half a claim to God's blessings, would inherit the full rights and privileges of heirs alongside God's rightful son, his only son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

For in Christ Jesus, he says, we are all sons of God through faith. And in fact, you see, this story is all about faith, faith in God. Not just Jacob's faith in passing on this blessing, but also the faith of Joseph and his sons in receiving the blessing.

Look what it is that Jacob's blessing entails here. It's all about a promise for the future, isn't it? The promise, verse 4, you see, of an everlasting possession over against the very present, but nevertheless temporary, possessions that Israel had gained in Egypt.

[17 : 42] And it's a promise of everlasting hope over against the very present reality of weakness and mortality, which is right to the fore in this scene. Look at verse 7.

It seems rather odd, doesn't it, in the middle of all of this, that we suddenly have this mention of Rachel's death. It doesn't seem to be relevant at all to what's going on here. But you see, when you remember back to Genesis chapter 35, where it was that God appeared as El Shaddai to Jacob to bless him, it was right after that happened, wasn't it, that Rachel died and Jacob was bereaved.

I'm sure Jacob could never recall that experience of El Shaddai, the God of sufficiency and power, appearing to him. I'm sure he could never remember that without also at the same time being conscious of his own sadness and pain and a reminder of his own mortality.

I'm sure that as he looked at Joseph in front of him there, he looked at Joseph's sons, and he saw in their faces reminders of his beloved wife, Rachel.

I'm sure he couldn't help but being hit with a sense of the helplessness of mortality. How could it be otherwise? And yet it was in the midst of that grief and that helplessness that God had revealed himself to Jacob and gave him hope in this everlasting promise.

[19 : 14] promise. A promise that had sustained him then and had still sustained him even now right to the time of his death bed. The hope of a solid joy and a lasting treasure in the presence of his God, in the presence of El Shaddai, the all-sufficient one, forever.

A glorious hope. hope. And yet still just a promise. It couldn't have looked like very much there, could it, to Joseph's two sons, just an old man in a tent on his deathbed, compared with the finery of the grand vizier's residence in Egypt that they'd ridden out from, no doubt, in their glorious chariot.

And this talk of an everlasting possession in a faraway place that they couldn't see, in fact, they never had seen, over against everything that was already theirs and could be theirs in Egypt because of what they had there.

And they were being faced with a choice, weren't they? To be Joseph's sons and inherit wealth and position and noble rank among the finest in the land of Egypt or to become Jacob's sons and only to have the promise of something in the future.

And as John Calvin reminds us, they could not be reckoned among the progeny of Abraham without rendering themselves detestable to the Egyptians. Remember chapter 46 verse 34, all herdsmen are an abomination to the Egyptians.

[20 : 56] Christians. They'd be leaving the place of acceptance by the world and going to the place of being despised by the world. And all for a reward that was still afar off in the future.

God's blessing, the blessing of God Almighty, was not only a bestowal of an enormous privilege from God, but it was also a call to faith. The faith manifested in leaving the treasures of Egypt and facing reproach with the people of God, in leaving everything for the sake of a reward that God has promised but is yet unseen.

of course that's exactly how the New Testament puts it when it teaches us about what faith really is.

What did Edward say last Sunday night? The focus of Paul's gospel is primarily eschatological, concerned with a future that is still to be possessed.

Well, friends, here's something for today. The focus of Moses' gospel is primarily eschatological. Remember who Moses' first readers were who heard these stories first.

[22 : 17] It was the Israelites, wasn't it, in the wilderness who had left Egypt and were journeying to the promised land, the promised land, not yet possessed. Now, they had experienced hardship and toil and slavery in Egypt and God had rescued them.

And yet, remember, they kept talking about wanting to go back as though things were better in Egypt. But look, he's saying to them in this chapter, look, look at these two, Ephraim and Manasseh.

They weren't slaves in Egypt. They had everything. They had power and wealth beyond imagining in Egypt. But, as we'll see, they did put all that behind them to cherish something far, far better, a precious birthright among the people of God, whose promise transcends all the possessions in this world and all the pain of our frail mortality.

And Moses himself knew perhaps better than any the cost of that decision. Because he too had faith, he too had trusted the promise of God. Remember Hebrews 11?

By faith, Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Choosing rather to be mistreated among the people of God, he considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt.

[23 : 39] For he was looking to the reward, the promise. It was a costly choice for Joseph and his sons, as it was for Moses.

But it was a clear and a deliberate choice, says this chapter. Joseph took his sons to Jacob knowing what was going to be transacted. And verses 8 to 12 tell us of that formal ceremony.

That's what the language conveys. Who are these, he says. He knows who Joseph's sons are. He's just named them at verse 5. But it's like a wedding, isn't it? Who gives this woman to be married to this man?

It's formal language of an adoption. It's part of the ritual. Although verse 10 does say his eyes were bad and we can't help but remember the scene of Isaac's blessing of Jacob, can't we?

But here there's no deceit. You see, there's just open thanksgiving. Verse 9, Joseph thanking God for these sons that he's given him.

[24 : 46] And verse 11, Jacob also thanking God for his goodness, not only in seeing Joseph again alive, but seeing also his sons. And so they're formally embraced, these boys, kneeling by Joseph's knees as though to be sons upon his knees.

And Joseph, verse 12, is thrilled. He removes them and he bows his face to the earth in worship. It's a wonderful picture, isn't it? Of a man bowed in worship in the presence of his children, having led them to the source of eternal blessing from God Almighty, from the covenant God.

We can't help, can we, but think of the Lord Jesus and those eager parents who brought their children to him because they desired above all else the blessing of God Almighty upon them.

And of course the Lord commended them vocally. What did Joseph's sons think, do you think, when they saw their father, the great ruler of Egypt, bowed down to the ground in a smelly old tent before this decrepit dying man?

Well, surely they saw in John Calvin's words, that Joseph regarded it a greater privilege to be a son of Jacob than to preside over a hundred kingdoms.

[26 : 10] He prefers reproach to every kind of wealth and glory if they may but become one with the sacred body of the church.

It does prompt the question, doesn't it, what do our children, our friends, our family, what do they see in us as most important? What do we value above all the wealth and the glory and success in life?

What do we want both for ourselves and for our families, our children? Especially for fathers, what do we want above all else to pass on as a legacy to our children?

children? What are we determined that they will know that we regard as the greatest gift that we can give them? Not just by the way we order things on our deathbed but all through our life long before.

It's a searching question, isn't it? And the answer is revealed in all kinds of choices throughout life that we'll make in so many different ways. Is educational advancement or sporting achievement or musical prowess or social acceptance or a hundred other things.

[27 : 28] Is that so important for our children? That a Christian education and church involvement and nurturing the faith, I must just get fitted in where it can amongst all these other vital important things.

Of course, life is busy. Time's in short supply. We all have terrible struggles, don't we, prioritizing our lives? And there's no formula. And indeed, formulaic legalism in these sorts of things is absolutely no answer.

But the real issue lies in our hearts, doesn't it? What are our hearts' desires for our own lives, for our families?

Is it the promise of God? Really? Really? What are the very present and obvious treasures of Egypt? See, when you're about 20, that's about perhaps the age of Joseph's sons, when you're from a Christian home, but you're off to university or college or work in another place, the promises of your parents' faith can seem a pretty feeble, far-off thing, can't they?

Compared to the thrills and the bright lights of the city. But friends, adoption into the precious birthright of a secure home among the people of Christ, that is better than anything this world can ever afford.

[29 : 04] Some of you oldies will remember these words that used to be sung by George Beverly Shea, Billy Graham Singer. I heard them recently. And I was thinking about them.

I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold. I'd rather be his than have riches untold. I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands. I'd rather be led by his nail-pierced hands.

I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause. I'd rather be faithful to his dear cause. I'd rather have Jesus than worldwide fame.

I'd rather be true to his holy name. I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords.

I'd rather have sway. I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today.

[30 : 13] Remember it? I've got that stuck up in front of my desk where I work now to remind me of what really matters in my life and my family's life and your lives.

life. Don't let one another ever forget that. The grace of adoption, says John Calvin, as soon as it's offered to us, should by filling our thoughts extinguish our desire for everything splendid and costly in this world.

Well, so it was for Joseph's family. They grasped the precious birthright. And in verses 13 to 20, Jacob passes on then a prophetic blessing of a future service for them in the purpose of God who is all sovereign.

The God whose plans transcend all our imagining and indeed also transcends all our human conventions. Verse 13 and 14, you see, shows that although Jacob may have lost his sight, he certainly hadn't lost his insight.

somebody put it. Joseph lines up Manasseh, the firstborn, to Jacob's right hand and Ephraim to his left. But Jacob isn't mistaken in what he does in crossing his hands.

[31 : 42] He knows fine well what he's doing. He's already named them in that order back in verse 5. And again, it's shades of chapter 27 and Isaac blessing Jacob.

But again, here there's no double crossing, just a deliberate single crossing to bless the younger above the older as a deliberate act, as we'll see in a moment.

But he blesses these boys, young men really, who represent Joseph. He blesses Joseph, says verse 15.

And Jacob first invokes the God of blessing and then pronounces the blessing of God. And he's acting as God's chosen prophet and priest on the earth. That's who he was.

Who is this God of blessing? Well, Jacob gives personal testimony to the God of sovereign grace who's blessed him and blessed his fathers all the days of their lives.

[32 : 40] Verse 15, do you see? He's a sovereign presence before whom they walked. That means he ruled their lives as the covenant God. Walk before me and be blameless.

God said to Abraham, obey his command. But he's a sovereign provider, do you see? Shepherding Jacob, both leading him and feeding him all through the wandering paths of his sojournings.

And he's a sovereign protector, redeeming him, rescuing him from all evil, and indeed wrestling with him into the kingdom of God's saving mercy.

the angel, God himself in human form, revealing himself as the great redeemer of his people. And once again, pointing to the great future mission when he came at last as man, to redeem all the true seed of Abraham forever.

Just think back over Jacob's life story that we've read through. Think of the mess. Think of the folly. Think of the disasters galore. Think of the sin in his life.

[33 : 53] But this God had met him and blessed him and given him an eternal hope. This is the God whose blessing Jacob is determined to share with those that he loves, those that he longs to share that blessing of a ruler, of a shepherd, of a redeemer.

That's the God whose blessing we long to share, isn't it, with those that we love and care for, that what we have known from him would be theirs.

But look at what the blessing consists of, verse 16. Blessing means serving in and being part of God's marvelous sovereign purposes for the world.

In them let the name of Israel, God's covenant people, be preserved, he says, and let them grow into a multitude. You see, to share in the blessing of God is to preserve the name of faith and to propagate the people of faith.

And indeed, Ephraim and Manasseh did that. They became a vast number among the tribes of Israel. Israel almost became known as Ephraim. Ephraim is a word used so often to refer to the whole of the people of Israel.

[35 : 14] especially when the kingdom was later divided, north and south. If you read Psalm 78, you'll see that. Ephraim is the name given to Israel all the way through, although it's a very salutary psalm because it also reminds us that God rejected Ephraim ultimately because Ephraim rejected him.

He chose Judah to be the tribe from which his great king came. salvation. It's a salutary lesson that rebellion against God's privileged blessings will incur judgment.

His blessing bears a great responsibility on his people. They need to remember that. But don't miss the wonderful truth that we're being told here, that the greatest blessing from Almighty God is to be given a part in serving the great purposes of this sovereign God in the world.

That the all sovereign God delights to share his marvelous story of saving grace with his people, even with those who are adopted into his family from a very mixed background.

I think that is a wonderful encouragement to us, don't you think? Some Christians sometimes can feel that they're rather outsiders. They don't have perhaps the pedigree.

[36 : 37] in the Christian faith as some others in the church have. Maybe they don't come from a Christian family. Maybe they don't have the background and the blessing of a Christian upbringing among God's people. And sometimes people like that can feel, well, I don't really qualify for any role or any place of service in God's kingdom.

Well, of course, there's no doubt there is a huge, a marvelous benefit, a great blessing of being grown up and equipped for service of Christ from a very early age. And we should indeed expect our young people who've had those privileges to bear great responsibilities for that in the future in the service of Christ's church.

But God also does and loves to adopt people into his kingdom, into his family, and to confer upon them blessings in abundance, as he did to Ephraim and Manasseh, God's people.

And to bless them with a place in serving the sovereign purposes of God for this world, preserving the faith of Abraham, bearing witness to Christ, and propagating the seed of Abraham, bringing others to Christ.

And friends, there's no greater blessing that God can grant than that, to serve as a laborer in his harvest field, to share in his marvelous purposes, in whatever way that might be for our own particular calling, no greater blessing.

[38 : 07] And it's right that we should desire that blessing for ourselves and for our children and for our loved ones. But, and this is very important, being blessed in serving the sovereign God also means submitting to the sovereign God.

He is sovereign and none can control his hand of blessing, not even Joseph. You see, Joseph naturally resists Jacob's preference of the younger son, verse 17.

No, not this way, my father, he says. Yes, this way, Joseph, says Jacob. You see, God so often turns man's way on its head.

Indeed, he always does because he is sovereign. That just means God is God and that he rules and we don't. And covenant blessing, the saving mercy of God, comes from God's hand in God's way only.

It can't come to the proud that demand that God will fit in with their life and with their views about religion or morality or faith or whatever else it must be.

[39 : 26] The proud man, he cannot bless. Only the penitent, only the humble, who say, yes, Lord, your way to bless, not mine.

That's a principle, isn't it, that we find from the beginning of the Bible right through to the very end. From Cain and Abel right through to the rich young ruler, always. It's a principle for the salvation of God.

He is sovereign. He saves whom he will his way. But it's also a principle in service of God. He is serving, he is sovereign rather, and the blessing of serving his covenant comes to those and to those alone who will submit to his way and to his choice, who will bow to his sovereignty.

And that's hard. Even Joseph, with all his divine insight, struggled against the natural human instinct that says, no, come on, Lord, there's a better way to do this. And we struggle.

And sometimes God will test us also with one particular thing or another to see if we really can be blessed in service by submitting to our place in God's hands.

[40 : 46] Some of us may not find ourselves in life in the role or in the place in Christian life or service that we wanted, whether we thought was our calling or that we think should be our calling.

And when that's so, you know, it's very easy, isn't it, to become resentful of others that God does place into that place that we thought should be ours. Or it's very tempting to try and engineer for yourself these things, to have God's blessing the way you think God should be blessing you.

in all kinds of areas of our lives. Let me tell you, friends, you will never, ever succeed in doing that.

Never. And you'll ruin your life trying to. You'll be bitter. You won't be blessed. God's blessing comes to those who humble themselves and who submit to a God who is sovereign and who loves us and who knows for us the very best way to bless us.

But remember verse 15, he's a shepherd who provides for us. He's the mighty angel who protects us, including from our own selves, from our own stupidity and foolish ideas about ourselves.

[42 : 04] Even Joseph had to be reminded of that here. Great Joseph. But he did submit to Jacob, the prophet, and his sons were blessed that day God's way.

And they were given their place along with all who are also inheritors of the covenant promises through faith in Christ, a place serving the ongoing purposes of God's grace and mercy in this world.

And we need to help one another, don't we, to remember that. To remember that the Lord knows best how to bless each of us in life. That he is a providing shepherd, that he is a protecting angel.

That when we find ourselves saying in our hearts to God, no God, not this way, this way. To help us to be willing to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, knowing that he does care for us and that we can trust him.

And that's true of our life together as a church fellowship in difficult days. And it's true also of our own personal life of Christian discipleship.

[43 : 17] And it's that very tender individual focus that we see just at the end here in these last two verses, this little epilogue, where Jacob turns from the great concerns of all Israel to bless Jacob and his sons so personally in this personal benediction.

A fatherly assurance to his sons and grandsons of God's personal presence with Joseph himself in his time of grief and in his ongoing life after Jacob's death.

And also of Joseph's personal portion, his very own inheritance in the everlasting possession in the land of promise. I'm about to die, says Jacob.

It's the end of an era here. It's rather like Moses who said very similar words to Joshua at his death. But God will be with you. His presence will go with you as it always has done with me.

And, you see, he will bring you again to the land of your fathers. It's both a reminder to Joseph of where his true home was and a reminder of the great helper who would certainly bring him there, an assurance of a personal presence and of a personal portion.

[44 : 38] Verse 22, already a place was prepared for him, an inheritance for Joseph. Most probably, as I said, the place of Shechem where Jacob had bought land and then remember his family had conquered it, albeit in sad circumstances.

But Jacob's it had become and Jacob gave it now to Joseph. And, indeed, if you read on to Joshua, the very last chapter, you will see that centuries later, that is the very place where Joseph's own bones were buried by the Israelites when they were back in the land.

A personal benediction. He's saying, don't be troubled, Joseph. Trust in God. Trust also in me. He'll never leave you nor forsake you.

You have an assurance of his presence. You have a place in your true home. It's already been prepared for you. You can't help but think, can you, of the words spoken centuries later by the Lord Jesus to his grieving and troubled disciples as he was nearing his death.

I will not leave you as orphans, he said. Fear not. Trust in God. Trust also in me. My presence will be with you. I'll send you another comforter.

[45 : 56] And a personal portion. I go to prepare a place for you and I will come again to take you to myself that where I am, you may be also forever.

What a wonderful assurance that very personal benediction from Jacob must have been to Joseph. It surely strengthened his faith.

It surely helped him to stand firm in his own grasping of the promise right to the very end of his own life, to his own dying day. But how much more wonderful is that assurance that we have from Jesus' lips, that personal benediction from the lips of the redeeming angel himself, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. And I will come again to take you to myself to a place prepared for you in the Father's house, in your true home.

Friends, that is the blessing of God Almighty. And there's no greater blessing that you can pass on to your son or your daughter or to your husband or your wife or to your friends or to your neighbors or to any who you love.

[47 : 24] No greater blessing than to hold out this promise to them. If you will walk before this God, then he will be with you always. He will be a personal presence.

He'll be a providing shepherd and he'll be a protecting, redeeming angel to deliver you from all evil. And at your life's end, he'll bring you at last to your personal portion in the true home in the Father's house where there are many mansions.

To an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept even now, kept in heaven for you.

God Almighty appeared to me, said Jacob, and blessed me and promised me an everlasting future.

And that's a blessing I must pass on. That was Jacob's great testimony of faith at his life's end. Is that your testimony?

[48 : 30] Make it yours. Make the blessing of God Almighty yours and your testimony today and to the very end of your life.

There is nothing greater that this world can afford than the blessing of God Almighty, which can be ours through Jesus Christ his Son.

Let's pray. How we thank you, O God, for the blessing and the fount of blessing that is ours in Jesus Christ, our great shepherd and our great redeeming angel.

May we, like Jacob, be consumed and overtaken by the sheer joy of possessing that which is the greatest thing in all eternity.

So hear us and grant us faith to prize the treasures of Christ above all earthly things.

[49 : 52] For Jesus' sake. Amen.