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A Fathers Blessing Genesis 49

What pictures? What words? What will my son remember when he stands over my plain granite grave marker? What will my daughter remember? What will stream through my friends mind as they stand there replaying the mental videotape of significant interactions with me. If you are like me there are a number of things I've done and said I'd hope they forget. We all have words and actions we'd like to hit the delete button on. My desire, my hope is that they would remember the times when I was able to breathe a word of hope, buoy them up with an encouraging word when they were down. I hope they would remember times when I told them how much I loved them and I was so proud to be their father. I would hope they would remember times when I turned off the lecture, turned off the criticism and opinions and simply listened to their heart. I would hope they would remember pictures of laughter, smiles, some hard speaking the truth in love, words of challenge, integrity. I would hope that if I were to die next Wednesday, I would leave a legacy of blessing for my children, for my friends.

There is something so very important about a fathers blessing. We all hunger deeply for our fathers blessing. When that is missing it leaves a gaping, aching hole that longs to be filled. That need challenges us to pass on a legacy of encouragement. Maybe we never ever received that but we can choose to give a blessing. All of us here in this room are terminal. We will all die, some of us sooner than later. We will all die, but not all of us will really live. This morning I want to challenge all of us to live well while we still have breath and in doing so we die well. Part of living well is passing on a legacy of encouragement even challenging words to those we may leave behind, our kids, our family, members, friends at work, at church. You don't have to wait until you have just six

month left to pass on a legacy of blessing. You can begin now while you're in your 40's, now while your in college, Junior high, grade school. You may be a father, or a mother, or brother or sister or friend. My challenge for us this morning is to begin to intentionally passing on a legacy of blessing to those you know and love. There is something deep inside each of us that hungers to be blessed by those who know us well and yet love us still.

Turn with me your Bibles to the book of Genesis chapter 49. Jacob is close to death and knows it. He wants to give his sons some final words of blessing and challenge. These words he speaks to them have incredible power because these boys will remember these deathbed words far clearer than any other words he has spoken to them in years past. For some of you who are nearing the end of the life God has given you on this earth, do not take this power lightly. Seize the moments. You have the power to bless or blast. Do not throw away this incredible opportunity to use your words of blessing for good. Don't waste it. Don't think that just because you have made mistakes, blown it in the past that you have lost your right of voice. Jacob was far from perfect with his passiveness and favoritism, but like him, your words will have power if spoken in love and truth.

Jacob is very near death and gives his sons words of blessing and challenge. His youngest son was probably close to 50 years old by this time so he had plenty of time to observe them, their strengths and their struggles. He knew that often ones greatest strength could turn and be the source of ones greatest weaknesses as well. Jacob's words are intended to both bless and challenge. Jacob also sees beyond the immediate condition of the sons and sees deep into the future. These 12 sons would head up the twelve tribes of Israel. These traits would be passed down from generation to generation. Jacob wants to pass on a legacy of blessing and challenge to these men. As we look at the various character traits this morning; their strengths and challenge areas;

perhaps you might be thinking about which of these you might relate to, which one God might have you begin to work on. Perhaps our study this morning will spark a desire for you to bless your children or friend and encourage them with traits you see in their life. Perhaps Jacobs example will inspire you to not wait until your deathbed to begin passing on a legacy of blessing. It is never too early to begin passing on a legacy of blessing.

The first six sons mentioned in chapter 49 are sons of Leah. The next four are sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, handmaids of Jacobs wives. The last two Joseph and Benjamin are sons of Jacobs favorite wife Rachel whom he loved dearly. (READ) Genesis 49:1-4.

Reuben: *Strong potential wasted*

Reuben was the firstborn of Jacob. Like many fathers, Jacob pinned great hopes on his first son. “My might and beginning of my strength...” He had such great potential, but we read in v.4 he was “uncontrolled as water...you went up to your fathers bed and defiled it.” Reuben had strong God given drives, but is wasted them, abused them. He never learned to have God take control over his drives. He was uncontrolled, wild and reckless. Perhaps as you look at your life, you can relate to Reuben. Perhaps God has given you strong drives, but this past year you have wasted and abused that strength. Perhaps this blessing and challenge for Reuben is something you need to hear today. Your drives need to be brought under God’s control. You need to stop living with “self” in the driver’s seat and let God drive and steer and control your strengths. You have great potential and yet your bad choices are causing you to spill it all out and waste it. Perhaps this new year what God wants you to do is to stop saying yes to selfish drives and recommit to following after God’s heart. Sometimes a fathers blessing speaks the

truth in love. Is God your father speaking truth to you in love this morning?

Simeon and Levi: *Justice run wild*

Simeon and Levi are brothers lets read Jacobs words to them. (READ 49:5-7) These were the two men who massacred the people of Shechem. Hamor the prince had date raped their sister Dinah. In retaliation, they wiped out the entire village. Simeon and Levi both had a very strong sense of justice. They knew evil and wanted to set things right. But they went far beyond mere justice. They slew men, women and children and even committed useless violent acts laming oxen as well. They allowed their moral outrage to get out of control. They took revenge into their own hands. That is God's job. Romans 12:19 "Vengeance is mine. I will repay, sayth the Lord." I know that many of you have been wronged this year. People have done wrong things against you. People have done wrong things against your friends and family. It is not your job to be the one who executes perfect justice toward them. When we decide God has put us in the place of judge and executioner we always destroy and go beyond what God intended. Let God be the righteous judge. Let God do His job. He is the only one who can do it fairly. How many of our relational troubles are because we attempt to be God in other peoples life and set evil to right? How many times do we get tripped up relationally because we apparently believe God is unable or unwilling to do His job of dealing out justice? Let God settle justice. He is the only One who can do it well and we are in no place to judge whether He has or hasn't.

Simeon and Levi took matters into their own hands and as a result they were given no portion of land. The tribe of Simeon was absorbed very early on into the tribe of Judah. Levi's family was given no land, but due to being loyal to Moses was made priests, and given a number of cities and scattered throughout the land.

Perhaps this past year you look back and see a growing tendency in yourself toward the critical, the opinion and are very quick to judge and express that judgment. Has your sense of justice run wild and become destructive? That sense of justice, a desire for right and wrong to be revealed is good. But perhaps this year God wants to couple control and mercy with your justice. Often our greatest strengths can also be our biggest weaknesses. Perhaps this next year, you will give up your rights to get back and let God be the Justice of the peace. Is this the area that Father God is wanting to bless and challenge you with this morning?

Judah: A *Servant Leader*

Judah blessing in v.8-12 is much more encouraging. (READ 49:8-12) Because his older brothers have failed, Judah assumes the leadership of the family. Judah was the tribe that all the kings from David on down came from. V. 10 “the scepter shall not depart from Judah...” Judah was the royal tribe selected for leadership. Look at the end of v.10 we see Jacob through the inspiration of the Spirit foretells the coming Messiah. Amazing how we see hints of the Christmas story even in this Old Testament last will and testament. Jacob says that “Shiloh” will come and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.” Shiloh means “the One who brings gives peace and refers to the Messiah we know is Jesus who came as a baby in the manger born of a virgin in Bethlehem.

For years God had given hints as to Whom this One, this Savior would be. God’s first hint was given that He would be a man coming from the family of Shem, one of Noahs sons. The Messiah would be a Semite. That eliminated 2/3rds of the worlds population. The Messiah would not come from Noahs other son Japheth, not an Anglo-Saxon. He would not be from Noahs’ third son Ham, not an African. Later God gave another hint that this Messiah would be a descendant of Abraham. That promise was repeated to Isaac. This meant Messiah would not be an Arab. When

God chose Jacob and not Esau the promise Savior search narrowed it down to be an Israelite and not an Edomite. Now here in Genesis 49:10 God has narrowed it down to the tribe of Judah. In I Samuel we find out that this Messiah would be from the family of David. So we see God's planning hand when Jesus was born at exactly the right time in history to a virgin in Bethlehem, offspring of David, from the tribe of Judah who were descendants of Israel, Isaac and Abraham from the family of Shem.

This One the Messiah, this Shiloh would bring peace and be an example of the ultimate leader. As you look back on this year some of you are realizing for perhaps the first time that God has called you into leadership. You may have come kicking and screaming, but its apparent that is what God has called you to. God has placed you in positions of authority and influence to speak truth and lead. God wants to grow you in your leadership this year by serving and loving the people you are called to lead. Jesus was the perfect example of leadership who "did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many." Mark 10:45. Is God calling you to lead well in your family? In church? At work? The community? Is servant leadership the area your Father God wants to bless and challenge you with this next year?

Zebulun: Light in a high-powered world

(READ v.13) The tribe of Zebulun settled down near the seacoast of modern day Lebanon. This tribe rubbed shoulders with the Phoenicians and Sidonians. They were merchant whose ships sailed around the world. As traders they had close contact with the rest of the world like no other tribe of Israel would have. Jacob said, "his flank shall be toward Sidon". Zebulun would be sitting right in the middle of the traders and movers and shakers of the known world. Perhaps God has placed you right up close and personal to businessmen of this world. That is both a blessing and challenge. You have a great opportunity to influence people

for right and lead them toward God. God calls us to be in the world but not of the world. That is the challenge. If your flank is constantly next to Sidon, then there is always the danger of having the atmosphere of the world creep in and begin to invade your own life. Romans 12:2 says in the Philips translation, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within." Perhaps this is your blessing and challenge from Father God that He will give you the strength to live as a strong light in a dark place.

Issachar: *Enslaved by material desire*

(READ 49:14-15) Is strong and works hard. He sees a good place. He sees a land that is restful and comfortable and pleasant. He works hard to obtain the land, but then becomes a slave at forced labor. Issachar is one who likes quality good stuff and works hard to obtain it, but ends up becoming a slave to the very thing he worked hard to obtain. This reminds me of people who have a taste for the good, the luxurious, the material possessions and also have been given a strong work ethic. They know if they work hard they will obtain, but when they finally possess they find out it does not satisfy. Material stuff, the good land, the good car, the good boat never fully satisfies...material stuff enslaves and controls. Perhaps you review your year and sense that materialism, the love of stuff is becoming more and more controlling in your thoughts, your attitudes and desires. Perhaps God has given you the ability to work very hard and diligent, but you have become more enslaved to stuff than you care to admit. Perhaps you wanted the good early and figured you could work hard to pay off that credit card debt but now it has gotten out of control and you are the borrower that has become the lenders slave. Could Father God be giving you a blessing and a challenge this morning. Could He be saying to you. Yes you work hard and are diligent, but this

craving for more has begun to enslave you. Find your significance in whose you are in Christ not what you own.

Dan: *Destructively critical*

(READ 49:16-18) Jacob viewed Dan as having a very sharp mind, intelligent and able to discern right from wrong. “Dan shall judge his people.” Some of Israel’s great judges came from the tribe of Dan. The ability to discern right from wrong is a great quality. There is a danger of becoming critical in a destructive way rather than a constructive way. If we see someone sinning we need to go to him with the thought of restoration. Dan however struggled with destroying people. He is a serpent that bites at the horses heels and the rider falls backward. There must have been something in Dan’s life that leaned toward a critical tearing down spirit that weakened his influence. Perhaps you see a bit of Dan in your spirit lately and God the father is giving you this blessing and challenge. See the truth, Yes! But then take steps toward restoration.

Gad: *Strength born from crisis*

(READ 49:19) Gad’s name means “raider” and his life was characterized by instability and constant conflict. The tribe of Gad settled on the eastern shore of the Jordan and every invading nation came through that area. He raided and was raided. Perhaps this constant conflict has marked your life. None of us ought to expect our life should always be easy, but it sure seems like God has called some to receive an extra dose of conflict. I know some of you have just been beaten on this past year. Deaths and sickness and relational conflict and financial pressure, work pressure. It seems you are a walking conflict waiting to happen. That same conflict can bring you great strength. I have seen God work

strength into you. If one responds with God's heart, with that conflict comes a great strength. In conflict one's faith grows strong and builds character. Is Father God giving you this blessing and challenge today?

Asher: *Wealth to bless others*

(READ 49:20) Unlike Gad, Asher is the one for whom everything is going their way. Asher's tribe was always very wealthy. God may have given you a life of affluence and wealth and relative ease this year. What a blessing. But it is also a challenge, as often behind our greatest strength lies our greatest weakness. Paul wrote in I Timothy 6 "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be proud (wealth can make us proud), don't fix your hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works ready to share." Perhaps you can relate to Asher as God has materially blessed you this year. Do not become proud, but seek ways to become a blessing to others.

Naphtali: *Emotional and poetic*

(READ 49:21) Naphtali is obviously good with words. Compared to a doe I see a picture of one whom God has an eye for beauty and gifted artistically. Yet just as if you let a captured doe set free she would run a bit erratically back and forth before deciding on a course of direction. Naphtali is one who may be prone to emotionally upset or easily frightened. If you can relate to a more emotional, beauty-appreciating poet like Asher, use your strengths to help others reflect on the beauty God has given around us. At the same time become grounded and stable by understanding who you are in Christ, "be rooted and grounded in love" Eph 3:16.

Joseph: *A productive life blessed by God*

(READ 49:22-26) Joseph is described as fruitful, productive. Even when he was attacked remains strong. Joseph was given a double portion of land. You may wonder why there is no tribe of Joseph. Chapter 48 explains that Jacob formally adopted Joseph's first two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh as his own. They became not grandkids but sons alongside of Reuben and Simeon 48:5 with full portions of inheritance. This explains how Joseph's sons became part of the tribes of Israel. Jacob blesses Joseph greatly and wants Joseph to remember where all this blessing comes from "from the hands of the Mighty One". If you have been greatly blessed this year don't feel guilty because others are getting hammered on, simply enjoy this time of blessing and don't forget from where all blessings flow. God is the One who gives and takes away. Blessed be his name.

Benjamin: *Insignificant yet victorious*

(READ 49:27-28) Benjamin is the last in line and also the least. Psalm 68 describes him, "Benjamin, the smallest, their ruler." Jacob describes him as a wolf. He is small, but like a wolf he will find a way to win. Perhaps you feel small and insignificant. Perhaps you have been listening to this list of character traits and haven't found anything you could relate to. Well, then this would be it. You may not have any special position or be a leader or businessman or judge or exceptional worker, or an artistic poet, or wealthy or productive. You may feel small up against all those. But there is encouragement, because even though you may feel small, if you are on God's side you are a winner. You are significant and of great value and purpose. He has created you with a reason and each of you have been given gifts by God to be used for His glory.

Often it's hardest for us to see our own strengths in us. So here is your homework. As Jacob did for his sons, I would like you to pour a

blessing into another persons life. Fathers pour a blessing into your children. Pour a blessing into your friends and family members. Pour a blessing by verbally or in written form simply telling them the character traits of strength you see in them. We don't do this enough. Thank God for them. It may be the most significant gift they will receive this month. All of us will die. We are all terminal. If may not be next Wednesday, but what blessing, what challenge will you pass on to them?

(Thanks to Dave Roper for his work on this passage in his sermon titled "What will be, will be")