



The Sermon

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Genesis 48:1-16

"Finishing Strong"

January 15, 2023

TRANSCRIPT

Genesis chapter 48. We're going to be looking at verses 1 through 16 today. The title of this message is "Finishing Strong." And that's what you want for your Christian life, you want to be finishing strong. And as we come to the end of Jacob's life, he is finishing strong. So I want to begin reading in verse 1.

"Now it came about after these things that Joseph was told, 'Behold, your father is sick.' So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim with him. When it was told to Jacob, 'Behold, your son Joseph has come to you,' Israel collected his strength and sat up in the bed. Then Jacob said to Joseph, 'God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and He said to me, "Behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession." 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. But your offspring that have been after them shall be yours; they shall be called by the names of their brothers in their inheritance. Now as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, in the land of Canaan on the journey, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath. 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.' So he said, 'Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them.' Now the eyes of Israel were so dim from age that he could not see. Then Joseph brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them. Israel said to Joseph, 'I never expected to see your face, and behold, God has let me see your children as well!' Then Joseph took them from his knees, and bowed with his face to the ground. Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right, and brought them close to him. But Israel reached out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, crossing his hands, although Manasseh was the firstborn. He blessed Joseph, and said, 'The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who had been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and may my name live on in them, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.'" We will stop the reading of God's word here. Let us go to the Lord now in prayer.

[Prayer] Our great God and Father, we approach You in the name and in the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has prepared the way to come before Your throne of grace. And we praise You that You receive us as we come clothed in the righteousness of Christ. And as we approach Your word this morning we ask that You would use Your Holy Spirit to be our teacher, our primary teacher and instructor. May He do a penetrating work in the depths of our soul this day. May He open our eyes to behold the truth, open our ears to hear the truth, and may He shape and mold us into the very image of Jesus Christ as we go through this passage. Father, we present ourselves as a living and holy sacrifice, and we ask now that You would renew our mind, and that we would be no longer conformed to this world, but that we would prove to know what the will of God is, which is good and acceptable and perfect. We pray this in the mighty name of Jesus Christ our sovereign Lord and Savior. Amen. [End]

In these verses we see Jacob coming to the end of his life; and what a life it has been. He now lays on his deathbed sick, elderly, almost completely blind. He is a dying man, and he requests that Joseph come while he is still alive, perhaps to see him one last time, and he gathers strength to do so.

But as Jacob is growing weaker and weaker physically, as he comes now virtually to the end of his life, the same time he is growing stronger and stronger spiritually.

Second Corinthians 4:16 describes this: "Though our outward man is perishing, our inner man is being renewed day by day." That's where Jacob is. His outer man is decaying, he is all but coming through death's doorstep, but he is growing stronger and stronger spiritually in the Lord. The weaker Jacob becomes, the stronger Jacob becomes. It's in his weakness that God's strength is made perfect.

And so Jacob is finishing strong. He's run the race; now he is a totally different man than when we first met him. Jacob the deceiver has now become Jacob the mature believer. And he is finishing his life with a burst of spiritual energy, he's sprinting to the finish, and as he approaches the end, he's not slowing down, he's picking up the pace, he's speeding up. And he really exemplifies the old adage, "It's not how you start the race that counts, but how you finish."

You want to finish strong in the Lord in your Christian life; and that's exactly where Jacob is. And I think it's fair for us to ask, "Where has this strength come from, and where will it come for your life and my life as we move forward in the will of God?" And I think the answer should be apparent to us from the verses that I have just read. because they so typify the life of Jacob.

And we see the word "God" mentioned throughout this section of verses, if you would let your eye just glance again at the page. I've taken a my pen and drawn a circle around every time I see "God" in these verses. And in verse 3 we see that "God Almighty appeared to Jacob." And in verse 4, though God has not mentioned, "He" represents God: "God spoke to Jacob and promised Jacob."

In verse 11, he says, "God has let me see your children." And in verse 15, he says, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked." And then again in verse 15, "God who has been my shepherd." And then again in verse 16, "The angel who has redeemed me." That's not an angelic being as we think of angels, this refers to a theophany, an appearance of God as the angel of the Lord. And there are times in the book of Genesis when God takes upon Himself a human form and approaches one of the patriarchs; and that is the reference here. Angels do not redeem, only God can redeem.

And so even an initial and casual reading of these verses, the focus of Jacob's life is apparent. It's upon God. As we go through this passage it's God, God, God. That's where he draws his strength. That's why he's picking up his pace. That's why he has a burst of spiritual energy. That's why even to the end he remains strong in his faith.

And this is exactly what you and I need. We must be God-centered, God-focused, God-dominated, God-saturated. We must be taking every thought captive to God. We must have such a towering view of God that we even interpret the circumstances of our lives in view of the providence of God. We must be seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these other things will be added unto us. "We must be setting our mind on things above," - Colossians 3:2 - "and not on things of the earth."

And so as you have come to church today - and what a great thing you've done, to come to be with the people of God to worship God today - let our thoughts, let our mind, let everything about us resonate with God. That's what's happening here in Jacob's life. And that is what must happen in our life. We must love God, look to God, learn of God, live for God. We must have a God-entranced life. So let's walk through this passage and let's see the effect that God has upon Jacob.

So the first thing I want you to note in verses 1 and 2 is "Jacob's resurgence," because he becomes infused with a measure of strength here as he lies on his death bed. And beginning in verse 1, "Now it came about

after these things." That refers to the end of the previous chapter in which Jacob has said, "I'm dying." And it was the right diagnosis of his life.

"And so after these things Joseph was told, 'Behold, your father is sick.' Joseph is at the palace, he's in another place, he's the Prime Minister of Egypt; and his father is in Goshen, which is in the Nile Delta, very fertile piece of land. And report comes to Joseph, as he is busy administrating the affairs of the nation, that, "Behold, your father is sick."

Well, this is serious, because his father is already dying. And now for a dying man to contract illness on top of the frailty and the decline of his body, now Joseph must drop everything and go immediately to his father. The word for "sick" here means diseased or ill. So it's not just that he caught some cold or something, but something is plaguing his already weakened body. And Joseph would probably rightly assume, "This might be the last time I see my father alive. I need to be at his side. And I want my two sons who barely know their grandfather," - because they've been separated (Jacob in Canaan, they in Egypt). He wants his sons to know his father. "So he brings two of his sons," - verse 1 tells us - "Manasseh and Ephraim with him."

In verse 2, "When it was told to Jacob, 'Behold, your son Joseph has come to you,'" the report must have come from one of the other sons who were near their father. Joseph would have come riding up in a chariot and had Manasseh and Ephraim with him. They could see Joseph coming, and so the report goes immediately to Jacob, who is horizontal in bed that Joseph has come.

Notice it says in verse 2, "When he received this report, Israel" - that's Jacob - "collected his strength." He was invigorated. He was revived. He mustered up all the strength that he possibly could, what little was left within him, and it says - "sat up in bed." I mean, he's been laying horizontal, just weak. But he hears the word that Joseph is coming, and it's just like an IV hookup of adrenaline and strength that surges into his body. And so now with great effort he sits up and props himself up.

That's where this story begins. And I think from this that we can learn that when certain occasions arise, a strong mind can dictate to a weak body. I mean, every mother knows that here today. After giving birth to a child or to twins or to triplets, and she is weakened; nevertheless, she can just collect her strength through the night and stay up with her children. Though she is so tired and drained, yet within her mind, within her heart, she's just quickened to take care of the child.

I mean, I know that as a preacher. How many times have there been on a Sunday morning that I could not even get out of bed, I could hardly raise my voice. But I'm not going to call in, I'm going to crawl in. And I come staggering in, I can't even sing the hymns, and don't have the strength. And walk up, and suddenly it's as if the breath of heaven blows and you're renewed with strength. And then when the service is over, immediately you go home and you just literally collapse for the rest of the day. No, a strong mind that is dedicated can dictate to a weak body.

I saw this in my own father, who was a wonderful father to me. When he came to the end of his life he moved in with my brother, who's a cardiologist, to take care of my father, and he was there on his deathbed, and we would always have to be with him. And he had a little bell, and he would ring that little bell whenever he needed to go to the men's room, which was like once an hour. And we would walk him there and help him get back into bed; he had no strength. We had to attend to all of his personal needs.

And I remember, it was Sunday, and it was time to go to church; and so to church we will go. And so we all got dressed in our family coats and ties, and the ladies put on their dresses, and as we're ready to walk out of the house, the door to my father's bedroom where he's been laying on his deathbed, the door opens, and my father comes walking out. He hasn't walked out in months. He has his suit on, his tie on, and announces he's ready to go to church. That's the last time I ever saw him outside of that bedroom. Church was a priority for him, because God was a priority for him.

And there are times in life when you are enabled to do something far beyond what your physical ability will allow you to do. And that's exactly where Jacob is. He rallies. He's rejuvenated. Why? "Because Joseph my son has come." And so this leads us now, second, in verse 3, to "Jacob's remembrance," because in this weakened physical state, Jacob's mind now goes to what is most important. It goes to God.

And so we read in verse 3, "Then Jacob said to Joseph." Joseph has obviously come into the house, he's brought his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim, and he now is close. Joseph is now close to Jacob, and Jacob speaks to Joseph. Now please note what comes out of his mouth. What comes out of his mouth is what's most important in his heart. There's an old saying, "What's down in the well comes up in the bucket, and what's down in the heart comes out of the mouth."

First two words out of Jacob's mouth: "God Almighty." Can you see how he's finishing strong? Can you see how he's running the race before him and he's pressing on to the finish line of his life, and God is the dominant force of his life? He says, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan."

God Almighty, two words there. In the Old Testament many different names for God in the Hebrew. This is one you'd probably recognize: El Shaddai. "El" means the mighty One, the powerful One. And "Shaddai" probably comes from an Acadian word that means mountain, towering mountain. And so this name for God represents Him as the Almighty on top of the world, on top of a mountain looking down into the valley of human circumstances and towering over the whole range of life, everything beneath God, God at the very apex of what would be almost in an organizational chart for the universe. I mean, God is at the pinnacle and at the peak, and everything is below His feet, and He has all power to do all things.

And this is a good time just to pause for a moment and for us to be reminded that because God is Almighty – think about this: "Almighty" –

there is no power outside of God, He has all power. And what little power you and I have even to live our little physical lives are on loan from God. That power has just been delegated to us from God. And when it comes to the time of our death, all God does is just remove His power. He just stops giving the power to live. And so God has all power.

Let us also remember that the world is not this tug of war between God and Satan, between two equal superpowers. The devil has no power except that which God has allowed him to use. But greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world. And so God has all power. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and it was God who just spoke everything into existence.

Now let's also remember at this point that there is nothing hard for God to do. There are many things that are hard for me to do. There are many things I don't even have the strength to carry it out. But for God, nothing is hard. There are no hard prayer requests that you will bring to God that are a challenge to God to answer. He's the Almighty; it just has to be in His will. But there is no obstacle that can hinder God answering our prayers. There is no resistance that can be offered up to the Almighty. He overpowers circumstances, He overpowers lives to carry out and accomplish His own supreme, sovereign purposes. This is the God that Jacob knows. Not just God: God Almighty. And as you pray to God, what a great name to use as you approach the throne of grace: "O God Almighty, would You hear my humble petition?"

And so, "God Almighty" - Jacob said - "appeared to me at Luz." Luz is - Jacob renamed Luz "Bethel," which means house of God. "Beth" (B-e-t-h) in the Hebrew means house, "el" (e-l) means God. "Bethel" means house of God. "Bethlehem" means house of bread. And so Jacob renamed Luz house of God, and it was there that God appeared to him in what we call a theophany. Theologians refer to it as a theophany. It is an appearance of God to the patriarchs.

And as God appeared to Luz, he says, "and He blessed me." Now this word "blessed," it's a word that we use that's - it sounds so good, but what does it mean? And in the original language with which this was written, in the Hebrew language, *barak* means to kneel down. Isn't that interesting? This Almighty God as though on a towering mountain looking down upon the world that He has created and the circumstances that are unfolding has knelt down and drawn near to His people to come into intimate contact and close communion and fellowship with His own people.

You see, in theology there is both the transcendence and the imminence of God. The transcendence of God is that God is high and lifted up, towering above heaven and earth. Isaiah 6:1, "In the year the King Uzziah died I saw the Lord high and lifted up." That's the transcendence of God: no one over God, no one next to God, everyone and everything under God. He is in the heights of heaven. But He's also imminent. He is also near. He also bends down and kneels down and comes to us in our times of need. He draws close to us. He is relational. He is connected. He's plugged into our lives. What an awesome God we have, and we serve.

"And He blessed me." Now the word "blessed" is often repeated. I remember when I was in seminary and studying under R. C. Sproul, a lot of my classmates kept using the word "blessed": blessed, blessed. Everything was blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed. And I remember R. C. stopping and he said, "If I hear you say the word 'blessed' one more time I'm going to scream. You've got to come up with synonyms. You've got to come up with another way to say 'blessed,' because every extra time you're using it, it's just becoming less and less potent." So he said, "You should say, 'God favored me.' You should say, 'God graced me.' You should say, 'God has multiplied grace and bestowed grace upon me.' You should say, 'God has opened the windows of heaven and poured out and lavished us with His presence and with His provision.'"

So Jacob had not sat under R. C. Sproul and just says, "He blessed me." I want you to know God has blessed you if you are a Christian. This great God of heaven who towers in His transcendence has come to you in His imminence in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. And Christ came into the

human race so that He could be connected to us and be one of us and reach us, in order that God the Father might bless us through His Son Jesus Christ. And the only blessing that you and I will ever know is when we are in Christ, as a believer in Christ. There are no redemptive blessings outside of Christ, they are all to be found in Christ.

And so, Ephesians 1:3. Listen to Ephesians 1:3, "Blessed be," and that means praise be. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Every spiritual blessing has been bestowed upon you in Christ Jesus, nothing has been held back. That's how graced we are. That's how favored we are. Forgiveness, righteousness, redemption, on and on and on, adoption all of the blessings that are ours in Christ. For Jacob, he goes on to describe what this blessing is in this case. You know, there's progressive revelation in the Bible, and you start in Genesis and it's almost like it becomes - it's opening up, and by the time you get to the New Testament there's a fuller disclosure of all of the blessings that are ours in Christ.

Well, we're back here where the stream first begins to flow, and it will eventually become a mighty river that will empty into the ocean of God's full blessing. But here in verse 4 the blessing is, "He" - God - "said to me," - Jacob - 'I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and I will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession.'"

Now here's what's remarkable about this. Jacob heard this years earlier, and there's nothing written down, and there's no iPad here that he can just Google up what God said to him from years ago. And when God spoke to him and communicated this blessing - that he would be fruitful, that he would have numerous offspring, and that they will possess the land that God will give them - it was so burned into his mind, so etched into his psyche, he could never forget those words. They have been reverberating within his soul. They are in his very - in his bones; he remembers this. And so it just comes spewing out of his mouth, these words that God had spoken to him: "I will make you fruitful" - meaning you will you will have many children - "and

numerous," - your children will have many children - "and I will make you a company of peoples, and I will give this land to be yours forever.

Would you please note here in verse 4, "I will, I will, I will." God undertakes this upon Himself regardless of man. This is what God will do. I love - it just doesn't say, "We will do this together," God and Jacob, God and Abraham. No. God says, "I will do it through you."

I'm reminded of a sermon that Charles Haddon Spurgeon preached years ago, Charles Spurgeon the prince of preachers. He says, "I love whenever God says, 'I will.' When a man says, 'I will,' what is it good for? He says, 'I will,' and he never does it. He says, 'I will,' and it never comes to pass. But when God says, 'I will,' it will be done." And what God is saying, "I will do," - it will come to pass - "that you will be a great nation," - this is the repetition of the Abrahamic covenant - "and I will put you in your land and it will be your possession forever."

And so Jacob is growing strong in the Lord even as he's on his deathbed, because he remembers the words of God, he remembers the words of God. And as you and I need strength as we run our race and live our Christian lives, we too need supernatural power to keep pressing on. We become tired, we become weary, we can be discouraged, we can be deflated. And where will we find the strength to endure in the will of God? And one means is doing what Jacob does here is remembering the words of God.

There's power in the word of God. There's strength in the word of God. This is why we must read the Bible and study the Bible. It's why we must memorize the Bible and meditate upon the Bible and recall the Bible to our mind. And these truths bring a surge of spiritual strength, when it's accompanied by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, in our lives.

Are you weak today? Have you come limping into church? Are you running out of gas? Do you need some wind in your sails? Then recall the word of God and bring it to your remembrance. Memorize the word of God, chew on

the word of God, and you will find strength to press on, because as Martin Luther says, "God put the power in the word, in the word."

Well, as we come to verse 5, I want you to see "Jacob's reallocation, Jacob's reallocation." Beginning in verse 5, "Now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine." Now what does this mean? Well, the two sons who were born before he came to Egypt, before Jacob came to Egypt, are Manasseh and Ephraim. And so Jacob is now saying that "Joseph's sons are my sons."

And what does this mean? Well, continue to read: "Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine." That's the second time Jacob the grandfather says of the grandsons, "They're mine. They shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are." What does this mean? It means that the grandfather, Jacob, is adopting his grandsons to now be considered his own sons so that they will have an equal share in the inheritance, and they will not be on the next tier down as everything becomes divided up, even the apportionment of land in the Promised Land. No, this is by grace that Jacob says, "No, they're mine. They will be treated, my grandsons will be treated as though they are my sons." And so for Ephraim and Manasseh now, they are Joseph's sons also, but treated as Joseph's brothers also, with an equal share in the inheritance. And Jacob is reallocating what will remain after he dies. You know, a dying man thinks about things like this: "What will it be like after I die, and who will have what?"

So, verse 6, "But your offspring," now who are these offspring? These offspring are the other children that will come from Joseph. They will be treated differently than the first two. "But your offspring that have been after them shall be yours." You see the contrast or the comparison between "the first two," Jacob says, "are mine." But now of the offspring, he says, "These other children who will be born while you're here in Egypt," - from Joseph - "they shall be yours." They will not be adopted, they will not be included in the full portion of the inheritance of the sons, they will be a subcategory in the inheritance. It's interesting, is it not? It shows even in dividing up a family inheritance, it doesn't always have to be everyone gets the same. So we continue in verse 6: "They" - referring to the offspring -

"shall be called by the names of their brothers in their inheritance." In other words, they will line up under their brothers.

So here we see Jacob as a dying man realizing that he will leave his possessions and inheritance behind, that he cannot take things with him. You've heard it said that you'll never see a U-Haul behind a hearse on the way to the funeral or the cemetery. And so he gives thought to the inheritance that he will leave behind and how it will be distributed. You see, when you come to death, it sharpens an eternal focus. And that's the way we should always live.

It may seem to you morbid that I would say the word "death" and say we need to be thinking about your death. But today you should think about your death, so that when your time of death comes you die well, that you die finishing strong, and that you die, as John Wesley said, of those in the Methodist movement in the 18th century, "Our people die well." They're not whimpering on their deathbeds, they're not full of bitterness, but that they die content in the Lord. You need to think today what will that day be like, which is your last day here upon the earth. And if you will think about that and make significant alterations in the way you conduct yourself today, when that day comes, it will be well for you.

There's one towering example that I must give you, the example of Jonathan Edwards. Surely you're familiar with the name Jonathan Edwards. He's arguably the greatest preacher ever born on American soil. Preached that great sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" that's often so scoffed at in public schools. It's rejoiced and in heaven, let me tell you. And when Jonathan Edwards was 18 and 19 years old - he was converted at age 17 - he had just graduated from Yale University. He grew up in a pastor's home. His father Timothy - East Windsor, Connecticut - was a Puritan pastor.

But Jonathan Edwards was not converted until he was age 17. And at age 18 he began to pastor his first church. He was actually an interim pastor in downtown New York City on Wall Street. And it was a Scottish Presbyterian church that had split and they needed someone to come in as

an interim to be the pastor, and so Jonathan Edwards, only a believer for only a year or less, he goes to New York City and he become the pastor.

Well, he needs to chart a course for his life as he's there, and so he writes over the course of a year-and-a-half. He just keeps adding to them what's known as his resolutions. There are 70 resolutions that he wrote, which would become like a moral compass for his life to keep him on track; he would review these resolutions. And it was a somewhat common thing back in that day to write out their resolutions. Well, out of these 70, the first 4 deal with living for the glory of God, and the last 66 detailed how he would live for the glory of God, and out of those 66 resolutions several deal with thinking about his deathbed.

I've been in the very room where he died at Princeton University on the second floor of what was then the President's House. Ever since he was a teenager Jonathan Edwards had prepared for that last day of his life. He never knew when it would come, but he wanted to die strong in the Lord and strong in faith, and he wanted to die without regrets. Let me read a couple of these resolutions to you. Other resolutions deal with other subjects that would help him live for the glory of God; but if he was to live for the glory of God, he must have an eternal perspective on his life; not a temporal, short-term perspective, but a long-term, eternal perspective on his life. You would do well to do the same.

Resolution Number 7: "Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life." Number 9: "Resolved, to think much on all occasions of my own dying, and of all the common circumstances which attend death." Number 17: "Resolved, that I will live so, as I shall wish I had done when I come to die."

You see, Jonathan Edwards didn't just happen to become Jonathan Edwards, Jonathan Edwards had charted a course for his life to become the towering Christian figure that he became. Number 52: "Resolved, I frequently hear persons in old age say how they would live if they were to live their lives over again. Resolved, that I will live just so I can think I shall wish I had

done, supposing I live to an old age." You need to decide right now today how you want the final chapter of your life to be recorded, and then back into this present moment and make some resolutions on how you desire to finish strong in the faith.

You know, the government's come up with a new statistic, I don't know if you've heard it: "One out of every one person dies," OK. I'm sure it took billions of dollars for them to do that survey. But if no one's told you you're going to die and if no one has told you are dying and your heartbeat has been called the drumbeat of a funeral dirge that is beating as you are walking to the end of your life, will you finish strong? Well then, you must take some necessary steps today that leads you into the future. And as we see Jacob here, Jacob is finishing strong, because he is focused upon God.

Now in verse 7, "Jacob's reflection": "Now as for me," - so he shifts now from Ephraim and Manasseh and Joseph and talking about them, and Jacob now shifts his gaze and focus upon himself, not in an egotistical way, really in a very humble way, and he says this in front of Joseph and his two grandsons, which must have been a powerful testimony for them to hear their grandfather say these words. And when you come to the end of your life you begin to think about even more so what is really important. And here it was his relationship with his wife Rachel that has caused him much thought.

And so we read in verse 7, "Now it's for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, in the land of Canaan." His approaching death has made him reflect upon her death and what it must have been like to bury his own wife. And then at the end of verse 7, "and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). And he said in the previous chapter that after he dies he wants his bones to be gathered up and his bones to be carried back to Canaan to the Promised Land, and he wants to be buried in the land where Rachel is buried, and it reflects his strong tie and commitment to Rachel as he reflects upon her and how she had done him good all the days of her life, and he wants to be buried there in that land. Death has a way of helping you sharpen your focus upon what's very important.

I've been to Princeton Cemetery, which is known as the Westminster Abbey of America, because of all the famous people who are buried in Princeton Cemetery, and there are two, there are two who are buried side by side. They don't have a tombstone, but they have the marker that lays flat on the ground. It's in Latin; and it's Jonathan Edwards and Sarah Edwards Sarah, Pierpont Edwards, as she came from one of the premier cities of the colonies and brought her social graces to help polish Jonathan who was awkwardly academic. And they're buried there side by side, and it reflects their union together.

I've been to Northampton, Massachusetts. Northampton is where Jonathan Edwards was pastor for 22 years. And in his home a young missionary came to live with him whose name was David Brainerd, who had been a missionary to the Native Americans in Stockbridge, New York. And he contracted tuberculosis, and he comes to Edward's house, and dies in Edward's house, all but in the arms of Edwards. His nurse who cared for him was one of Edward's daughters Jerusha, and they fell in love; but he died before they could marry. And so there in the cemetery at Northampton, I see their graves next to each other. Though providence denied them being able to marry, they nevertheless are buried side by side. And that's something of what's going on with Jacob: "Even after I die, take my bones back to where Rachel is, and bury me there."

Verse 8, "When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, 'Who are these?'" Well, they saw them, but he didn't see them, because he's almost blind, and he can probably only see a silhouette, but not the face; the figure, but not the face. And so we have to ask the question, "Who are these?" asking for some identification from Joseph in verse 9.

"Joseph said to his father, 'They're my sons, whom God has given me here.'" I just need to pause for a moment. Please note that Joseph understands that God is the giver of all life, and that children are the fruit of the womb and the blessing of God. And I'm not going to go into it right now, but I just can't pass this without saying that abortion is a grisly, murderous sin against God; and a woman has no right to take another life, no matter where

that life is. It just happens to still be in her. But that's not her life, that's another life; and to take that life, you become a murderer.

Well, Joseph understands that "God has given me these sons." And Jacob said, "Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them." So he brings them closer and closer to him.

Verse 10, "Now the eyes of Israel so were so dim from age that he could not see." Well, he could see, he just can't see. He can only see partially, but not clearly. "And then Joseph brought them close to him," - within arm's length; Jacob is now sitting up in bed - "and Jacob kissed them and embraced them." He's becoming even tenderer and more affectionate as he comes to the end of his life. And that's the kind of maturity that is built into and developed into a believer as they grow in Christlikeness, they become more like Christ, and they become more affectionate and more loving.

I mentioned my father earlier. I saw that in him. Growing up he was a stern, strict taskmaster; and I've been taken to the woodshed many a time. Those were come to Jesus meetings; and I learned from the "board" of education. And toward the ends of his life you could hardly recognize who he was, because he had become so affectionate, so giving, so soft-spoken, so encouraging. And that's the kind of growth and grace that takes place in our lives.

There's a holy mellowing in some ways that takes place; and that's what we see here in Jacob's life. And here are his grandsons, "and he kisses them," a grandfather smothering grandsons with kisses and embracing them. And this word "embraced" means to clasp. He clasped them tightly and held onto them for an extended period of time.

And then, "Israel said to Joseph, 'I never expected to see your face,' - I mean, he can see, but he can't see, and this is beyond his wildest dreams and imagination that he would ever be reunited with his son Joseph, and verse 11 - 'behold, God has let me see your children as well.'" And so this

is the greatest treasure, the greatest blessing that could have ever come to him. You could have given Jacob a billion dollars and he would have yawned. But to bring him Joseph and his two grandsons, that makes his heart leap out of his chest.

"Then Joseph took them" - his two sons - "from his knees," - Jacob's knees, so that indicates that the two sons were relatively young to have been resting on their grandfather's knees, and he takes them - "and then Joseph bowed with his face to the ground." Even as a mature adult at this point, Joseph is 39 years old at least. He's still honoring his father. He's still respecting his father. He's bowing down with his face to the ground, humbling himself and lowering himself before his father. How commendable is this. We've seen this time and time again in the book of Genesis, that sons showing respect to their father.

In verse 13 we see, "Joseph's reversal": "Joseph took them both" - he took both sons - "Ephraim with his right hand towards Israel's left, and Manasseh with his left hand towards Israel's right," - here's what's going on. The right hand is very symbolic of power and authority and granting of privileges, the right hand. Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father of the Majesty on high. And so Joseph being very strategic positions Manasseh, who was the firstborn son, right in front of the right hand of Jacob as they're facing each other. So, left hand of Manasseh, right hand of Jacob, and then the opposite with Ephraim. He puts him over here on the other side so that he will be positioned across from the left hand of Jacob, wanting his firstborn son, the oldest son, to have the premier place in blessing - "and brought them close to him."

But look at verse 14, "But" - unexpectedly - "but Israel stretched out his right hand" - whoa - "and laid it on the head of" - not Manasseh - "Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, crossing his hands." He has inverted the order and bestowed the greater privilege upon the younger son.

And this is so much like how God works. God delights in always taking the lesser person to do the greater work, because God gets all the credit, and God gets all the glory when the lesser does the greater work. First Corinthians 1:26, "Consider your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh," not many who had been educated in Athens under Plato and Socrates and Seneca - "not many wise according to the flesh has God called."

God has bypassed those who are well-educated and secular humanism and deleting estates and universities of the day; God just yawns and walks past them, and God calls those who the world considers to be foolish.

"Consider your calling, brethren, not many wise according to flesh, not many mighty," - not many mighty in finances, not many mighty in politics, not many mighty in worldly education; that's not who God chooses to do business with; a few, not many - "and not many noble." The Greek word that means of noble birth, blue bloods, elite, top social standing. Oh, there'll be some, but that's not how God operates. God delights to reach down to the bottom of the barrel to pick His people. Next verse, "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world the confound the wise and the wicked," - Why? Next verse, 1 Corinthians 1:29 - "so that no man may boast before God."

If this church here was a church of all road scholars, billionaires, Miss Americas, three-time all-Americans, everyone would say in Dallas, "Well no wonder they're doing so well, they've got all the superstars; of course they're doing well." But when God takes a group of nobodies like us - I don't mean to hurt your feelings. But as someone has well said, "We're all a bunch of nobodies telling everybody about somebody: the Lord Jesus Christ." Yeah, there will be a few. There'll be a few. I mean, Don Moore over here played college basketball at Texas Tech University, the duke of the Southwest. I mean, we've got a few rock stars in here.

George Whitefield was the great evangelist of the 18th century, and he started an orphanage which became a financial burden on his shoulders for the rest of his ministry, about killed him, having to raise money to pay for this orphanage in Georgia. And a very well-to-do elite aristocrat woman in

England, who lived on a vast estate much like Downton Abbey, was very generous with Whitfield and helped him pay off that debt. And so she had all of her friends come to her estate, and for Whitfield to preach to them. And Whitfield preached to the aristocrats, "Not many mighty, not many wise, not many noble," to humble them. And Lady Huntington, who was the precious lady that came alongside Whitefield and helped pay off that debt, she said, "I am saved by an "m" - the letter m. This verse does not say, "Not any noble." "Not many noble." She said, "I've gotten into the kingdom of God by a tiny little m."

But my point is, as Jacob crisscrosses his hands, it's very representative of how God does everything to build His church. When He starts the nation Israel, what does He do? He goes to Ur of Chaldees and He finds a moon-worshipping idler, Abram, to start the nation Israel. To take down Pharaoh, how does God do it? There's a little baby in a basket floating down the Nile River: Moses. This little baby will take down Pharaoh. And when Goliath comes roaring onto the scenes, who does God send to the front lines? He sends the youngest son, who's still got some peach fuzz on his chin, with a slingshot for heaven's sake, and takes down Goliath. That's the way God operates.

When God builds the church, where does He go to recruit His disciples? He calls fishermen, fishermen. He calls tax collectors to turn the Roman Empire upside-down. That's how God works. That's how God operates.

And so as we see this, this is just representative of Genesis through Revelation, that God delights in reaching to the bottom of the barrel to find His people, to use them so that all the credit goes to Him.

Now I've got to end. I know I'm way over, but that's OK, I haven't done this to you in a long time. Verses 15 and 16. See what's different is we did the elder thing after the sermon at the first service, so I'm on a little bit of borrowed time here.

OK, verse 15, "He," Jacob. This is Jacob's request. Jacob's request and then we're finished. "He" - Jacob - "blessed Joseph and said," - and now this threefold description of God. This shows us how God-focused, God-centered Jacob has become; God just comes pouring out of his mouth. And to bless others is to bless them with the truth about God, that's what you'll see here.

"He blessed Joseph and said, 'The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,' - he acknowledged that in the past they all walked immediately before the Lord, in the Lord, according to the Lord, after the Lord. They were God-centered men who followed the will of God. He brings it to the present now - "the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day. God has led me, God has protected me, God has provided for me, God has comforted me." James 1:17, "Every good and perfect gift comes down from God above, the Father of unshifting shadow, with whom there is no variation."

That's what God has done for Jacob: "All my life He has shepherded me," - and then verse 16, "the angel who has redeemed me from all evil." Angelic beings don't redeem people, only God can redeem people. And this is a theophany, a reference to the angel of the Lord, God appearing in earlier chapters of the book of Genesis appearing in the form of a man. "The angel who has redeemed me from all my evil," it's a reference to God who has rescued him out of every distress and calamity and adversity. "God has been with me every step of the way."

He now says, "Bless the lads; and may my name live on in them. After I'm gone, may all that I have stood for in God and my influence for God in my life for God live on in them, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." This is what a dying man wants. He wants his children and his children's children to follow the Lord. He wants them to carry on the faith that he has lived out. And so these final two verses 15 and 16 are actually a prayer to God, because only God can bless, that God would do a work in them into the future after he's gone, and that it would bring glory and honor to God. Now I'm as close.

How will you finish your life? Will you finish it in full stride, living for the glory of God, or will you slow down, be diverted, pulled to the side? The only way you can finish strong is for you to have the same focus upon God that Jacob has come to have. The fact that you're here today in church and that you've even stayed this long in church is an indication of where you are with God. So I want to encourage you. Stay focused on God, and you will be strong in the Lord.

Now if you have never believed in Jesus Christ, you're not going to finish strong, you're going to finish as bad as you could possibly conclude your life, because you'll go to hell forever. If you want to finish right and finish strong and be like John Wesley said, "Our people die well," you must have personal faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. There is no other Savior, and there is no other hope. The only way for you to enter into the presence of God with confidence after you die is for you to have repented of your sins and placed your faith in Jesus Christ, who is the Savior of the world.

So if you've never done that, this is God's invitation to your heart right where you sit. We wouldn't ask you to get up and walk forward or do anything. If you got out of your seat and walked forward I'd send you back to your seat. Right there where you sit right now you need in your heart of hearts to say, "Lord Jesus, I repent of my sins. I believe in You. I need You to forgive me of all my sins," in your own words, however you would express that to God. And if you've never done that, behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, today is the day of salvation.

Well, I need to close in a word of prayer and let you spend the rest of this day focusing upon God. So close with me in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, help us to maintain our focus upon You. Help us to live for You. Help us to be like Jacob. Help us to grow stronger and stronger as the years go by. And I pray that You would enable us to finish life's race in full speed, in Jesus' name. Amen.

You may stand for the closing benediction, and then you're dismissed. It comes from the book of Revelation 1:5, "To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood - and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father - to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. All glory to God. *Soli Deo gloria*. You're dismissed.