

**Genesis 49: 22-28; “The Shepherd, the Stone of Israel”, Sermon # 118 in
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The God that we worship and serve is a God who is good and does good. He is the God from whom all blessings flow. If any person, even a Christian, will not trust in His goodness they will become skeptical, critical, and eventually fall into despair because of it. The Psalmist David said in Psalm 27: 13 – “I would have lost heart (I would have despaired it says in the NAS), unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.” People, people like you and me, we need to know and trust in the goodness of the Lord.

If you do not trust in the goodness of the Lord, you begin to look around you and blame other people. Usually it is people in authority in church and state. They are the reason for your not being able to see and experience the goodness which you desire to have come to yourself. Men like Joseph knew better. Even though Joseph faced certain grievous trials in his life, he nevertheless trusted in God. And God bestowed blessings of all kinds upon him. God did this, not because Joseph was perfect or without sin. He did it because He is the God of all grace and the Father of mercies in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want you to see that Christ is the Shepherd and the Stone of Israel who is mentioned here in verse 24. So the question that I would like to raise with you is this: What were the blessings which came to Joseph that allowed him to be both fruitful and strong spiritually? And how can we know the reality of these blessings in our lives? There are 4 blessings which God gave to Joseph which are also given to all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, those who are trusting in Him.

They are 1st – The Blessing of his being placed by a well. (verse 22) 2nd – The Blessing of his bow being strengthened. (verses 23 and 24) 3rd – The Blessing of God’s help in all things. (verses 25 and 26) And 4th – The Blessing of God’s perfect timing in all that He does. (verse 27) Let’s look at these blessings and drink deeply of them, one by one.

1st of all – The Blessing of being placed by a well.

“Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; His branches run over the wall.” We see here that Joseph is being described as a fruitful bough or a branch. He could be either a tree or a vine in the sense that we are speaking of. The object that we are striving for in the Christian life is to bear good fruit unto God. It is the blessing of God alone that brings fruitfulness. Men are often spoken of in the Bible in this metaphorical way of being trees or vines. Let me show you a few verses which will convince you of this.

Turn with me to Luke 13: 6. “Jesus also spoke this parable: ‘A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.’ “Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and found none.’ “Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ “But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it.’ “And if it bears fruit, well.’ “But if not, after that you can cut it down.’ The certain man is God the Father. The keeper of the vineyard is Christ.

The Father comes looking for fruit in the lives of those who say that they know Him. In this case, the parable may have had immediate reference to the Jews, the whole nation of them, which He had planted and expected the fruits of righteousness to be gathered from the lives of these to whom He had given so many outward privileges and blessings to. On any tree, we could think of the leaves as a picture of the profession of life, the fruit the evidence of the reality

of life. In a fig tree the fruit appears before the leaves. In other words, the fruit of grace should appear before the profession of faith is made.

In the fig tree, if the fruit does not appear within 3 years it is considered a symptom of barrenness. So too, in the life of a professed Christian, if the fruit of righteousness; love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control is not evident in their life over time, something must be done in God's eyes, and from His standpoint. He will not let the tree stand in His vineyard indefinitely. The Son of God intercedes as this vinedresser does on behalf of everyone who is trusting in Him. Are you trusting in Christ, not only for the forgiveness of your sins but also for your continual and ongoing repentance of them in living your life to God?

Christ's sufferings on the cross, His perfect obedience which is imputed to you for righteousness; these all plead for you. But you will notice that there is a test given for every believer, and everyone professing to be a believer, but is not. Our faithful Lord Jesus digs and fertilizes around the tree, and then He will wait and look to see if fruit will appear in the 4th year. If it does not, then it is cut down. There is a finality to this cutting down. There is a time limit to God's patience and kindness which are meant to lead us to repentance. There must be fruit or there is no life. Unless we repent, we will all likewise perish.

In Joseph's case, he was a fruitful bough. His branches went up over the wall of all the oppositions and persecutions of men. He bloomed where he was planted. He was put through much digging and much fertilizing in his life, but not only did it not hurt him a bit, but it in every way caused him to bear fruit. This digging of God's was His work of taking away from Joseph his pride and selfish ambition in his life. To be fruitful for God, this is where it has to start. Unless you humble yourself and become like a little child you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Unless you deny yourself and pick up your cross you cannot be His disciple.

Joseph was listening to God's voice. He had dreams which God gave him. He related those dreams to his brothers and they thought he was proud. They threw him into a well because they hated him. But he had a spiritual well which was right there with him. The Lord was working in his heart and life. This was because God was intending to make him a fruitful bough by a well. Turn with me to Psalm 1 and you will see that every true Christian is this way. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night." "He shall be like a tree planted by rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper."

Your being a fruitful bough in God's sight is based upon the deliberate choices that you will make as a Christian. If you choose to walk in the counsel of the ungodly; those persons who live to themselves, who choose to forget God, who choose to neglect the Scriptures, who love the world and the things of the world, who do not care about the commandments of God; you cannot be fruitful. You can say that you are a Christian, but you are only a mere professor. You have leaves, but they are not green. You have roots but they are not watered by grace. You profess to know Him, but by your deeds you deny Him.

What matters ultimately is not what men think, but what God thinks. Is He pleased with your life? He was pleased with Joseph's life. But the reason that He was pleased with Joseph's life was that Joseph deliberately and prayerfully placed himself by a well. Joseph didn't have a book of the Scriptures, but he did have a well which did the same thing for him. It was His faith in the Living God which led him to draw from the well of salvation. The grace that came to him made him wise to do what was right, and to refuse to do what was evil.

Turn with me to Jeremiah 17, verses 7 and 8. “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord.” “For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.” This was Joseph. He did not have a book of the Scriptures as we do, but he was reading the book of God’s providence towards him rightly. He believed the dreams that God gave him when he was a young man.

He believed all that his father had taught him about God, and the Angel of the Lord, and the Messiah who would come someday to redeem God’s people. He saw the evil in his brothers hearts and lives and did not want to be like them. But that was not what saved him. You will see the difference between the righteous and wicked if you look down to verse 12 and following. “A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary.” “O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake You shall be ashamed.” “Those who depart from Me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters.”

There is the difference. Unbelievers and wicked, ungodly people are sinful because they forsake God. They leave Him behind in all that they do and say. They forget Him days without number. They do not want the knowledge of any of His ways. They forget or they do not know that He is the fountain of living waters. They do not pray to Him. They do not think about Him, that He is standing right next to them.

These living waters are the spiritual realities of the refreshment and nourishment which come from the presence of the Lord by the power of His Holy Spirit. This is what Joseph had. He had the blessing of being placed by a well. This is what every Christian has. The question is, will he drink from it? Will it become for him a well of waters springing up to eternal life? It will indeed, because of God’s faithfulness to all of His people.

2nd – Joseph also had the blessing of having his bow and his arms strengthened.
(verses 23 and 24)

“The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him and hated him.” “But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob.” “From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel.” The bow is the weapon with which game was taken, and that which was used both defensively and offensively in war. Even though the archers grieved him, shot at him and hated him, nevertheless, his bow remained in strength. His faith did not fail. The bow represents the strength of Joseph’s heart and the integrity of his actions which proceeded forth from his heart.

His heart was sustained by his faith in God, but his faith in God was sustained by God Himself. A righteous man shoots at sin to put it to death. But he shoots also in order to find and obtain spiritual food. “My food,” says the Lord Jesus, “is to do the will of the Father in heaven.” So it is with the Christian. He shoots in defense of truth and righteousness. And he shoots in order to obtain integrity of heart. His brothers were the ones who shot at him. He did not shoot back. He pleaded with them and his soul was in anguish over what they were doing to him.

As archers in their sin, they shot forth the hatred of their hearts at him, and they grieved him. He was for peace, but when he spoke, they were for war. (Psalm 120: 7) They sold him as a slave into Egypt. When he got down into Egypt and was working in Potiphar’s house; Potiphar’s wife shot at him to take away his integrity and his sexual purity by trying to convince him to lie with her. But his bow remained in strength. By faith he resisted her overtures to him and he fled the scene of temptation to immorality.

What was it that sustained his faith so that it would not fail and kept him from sinning against God? The text itself tells us. The arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of

the Mighty God of Jacob. This, my brethren, is where the victory over sin and temptation comes from; it comes from the Mighty God. What was it that kept him from falling into discouragement and bitterness and resentment when he was thrown into prison for doing the right thing and then left there for 2 years longer than he thought he would have to stay? It was the Mighty God of Jacob. The God who has done great things to answer his father in the time of his distress (Genesis 35: 3), and had told him about it, would be the same God who would deliver his life from all distress. Oh how important a blessing it is to our children that we tell them, the next generation, of the mighty works of the Lord. “One generation shall praise your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts!” “Men shall speak of the might of your awesome acts and I will declare Your greatness.” “They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, and shall sing of Your righteousness.” (Psalm 145: 4-7)

But it was even more than this for Joseph. It was in this way of God’s providential ordering of things that he learned Christ. Yes, he was saved from his own sins by faith. But he was also led to the place where he would be conformed to the image of Christ. He learned obedience through the things that he suffered. He learned compassion through the things that he suffered. He learned patience through the things that he suffered. He learned endurance through the things that he suffered. He learned to love his neighbor as himself through the things that he suffered. He became a great leader through the things which he suffered.

And this learning was all based upon the grace of the Mighty God which was given to him through the future sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ which would come thousands of years later. That is what is being intimated by the words of verse 24 – “But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob.” “(From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel.)” It is the Mighty God who made Joseph’s hands strong, but He would do it through the Shepherd and Stone of Israel, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the good Shepherd who would lay down His life for God’s sheep.

It was because of His perfect obedience that Joseph could obey God and resist the temptation to immorality. It was because of Christ’s perfect love to His enemies that Joseph would not hold a grudge against his brothers because of what they had done to him. It was because of Christ’s suffering at the hands of sinful men that Joseph could be sustained when he suffered. All of Joseph’s righteous reactions and progress in holiness came about because Christ died for him. Do you see Christ in this way in relation to your faith and your obedience?

The Stone of Israel may have a direct reference back to when God revealed himself to Jacob those many years before, at Bethel, when he went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there all night. He took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed and saw a ladder set up on the earth and its top reached to heaven. And the angels of God were ascending and descending upon it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said – “I am the Lord God of Abraham, your father, and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants.” “Behold I am with you and will keep you wherever you go.”

Jacob, when he awoke said – “Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it.” “How awesome is this place!” “This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!” And he took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on it, and called that place the house of God. This stone of Jacob’s represented the fact that God had revealed Himself to him. The God who had given him precious and magnificent promises would be with him. And Peter says in 1st Peter 2: 4-7 that when a person comes to Jesus Christ for salvation they are, “coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious”.

And that believers “as living stones are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” “To you who believe He is precious.” He is the chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes in Him will by no means be put to shame. Joseph was not put to shame, and neither will you who will take Him as your Savior and follow Him as your Lord.

3rd – Joseph received the Blessing of God’s help in all things.

(verses 25 and 26)

“By the God of your father who will help you, and by the Almighty who will bless you with the blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breast and of the womb.” “The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of my ancestors, up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.” “They shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.” Joseph, it was apparent, was separate from his brothers. He had great fellowship and communion with God, so much so, that he did not have to look to his brothers for their approval or even always be with his godly father to be sustained in his soul.

How did this come about? It came about because the Lord was with Joseph when he gave him dreams; He was with Joseph when he was mistreated by his brothers and sold into Egypt. He was with him and was his Helper in Potiphar's house. He was with him and was his helper when he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams. He was with him and was his Helper when he became ruler over all Egypt. And He was especially with Joseph in helping him to discern what he needed to do when His brothers came to Egypt and came to him looking for grain.

He tested their repentance over their past sin concerning him. He tested their love for their brother Benjamin. He did not withhold grain from them, but always sent them back to their father with more than they thought; even their own money in their sacks. He was Joseph's Helper in all things. And he will be your Helper too, my friend if you will seek him. Someone here may be especially worried and anxious over their financial state this morning. You do not see how you can go on in the financial condition that you find yourself.

Remember the words of Hebrews 13: 5 – “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.” “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you, nor forsake you.’” “So we may boldly say: The Lord is my helper; I will not fear.” “What can man do to me?” You say to me – Well, I could be dragged away to debtor's prison. No, you must cry out to the Lord to be your Helper and to give you wisdom. Psalm 30, verse 10 says – “Hear, O Lord, and have mercy on me; Lord be my helper!” Then it says, “You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness.” “To the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent.” “O Lord My God, I will give thanks to You forever.”

You must remember that God is the God of all blessing. His resources are not limited. In Jesus Christ He will give you all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Him. But along with Him, He freely also gives you all things. “Blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath.” His greatest blessing is that He helps us in everything. He helps you understand how to enjoy spiritual blessings in relation to the things of this world and this life so that You do not seek him just for the earthly blessings but you seek Him for Himself and to enjoy those things that He has given to us with a thankful heart.

He is with you in all of your activities, your meals and your conversations, and your work and your play and your sleep. He is the One who gives you friends, and a wife and children, and every person who is helpful to you in your life. He is with you in the deep things of the life, the things that you cannot understand, to comfort you, to cheer you, and to help you. He is

with you to give His blessing to mothers in their childbirth, to help them in it, and to give them milk to give their children; the blessings of the womb and the breasts. But the best of all is that He Himself is with us always and forever. His blessings in Christ will mount up to the everlasting hills because Christ's is an everlasting kingdom and God's blessings through Christ will never cease.

This is what God was promising Joseph. And because Joseph was separate from his brethren; his life was free from the many gross sins that they committed. He would receive an eternal reward which would be greater than theirs. They may have been saved, but he would be saved and rewarded according to his works. The same is true for each one of us who will be faithful to God through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. All of your good works and righteous life will be rewarded in the life to come. But even now, as you think of the future and what it might be like to have eternal life and a reward, will you not thank God that He has been your Helper in all things and He will be to the end of your days and the beginning of eternity? Praise Him for His help.

4th – I want to close by saying something about the blessing given to Benjamin. It is the Blessing of God's perfect timing in all that He does. (Verse 27)

“Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.” This prophecy shows us that this tribe was going to be very warlike tribe. And so the history of Benjamin proved to be in the Old Testament times. But if these verses that we have studied this morning concerning Joseph have a very great reference to our Lord Jesus Christ, we can also say that these verses concerning Benjamin must have some reference of fulfillment in the Apostle Paul. He was of the tribe of Benjamin, A Hebrew of the Hebrews.

Sometimes we sing the hymn in the Trinity, # 404. It says there – “We sing the glorious conquest before Damascus gate, when Saul the church's spoiler, came breathing threats and hate; the rav'ning wolf rushed forward full early to the prey.” But lo! The Shepherd met him, and bound him fast today.” “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf...” This is how Paul was before his conversion. In the morning of his life he was devouring the prey of Christians. After his conversion he became the Apostle who labored more than they all. At night he shall divide the spoil. Paul describes himself as “one born out of due time”, in 1st Corinthians 15: 8.

We should understand that God's timing is perfect in everything. It was perfect in the timing of Saul's conversion and what it would do for the forward progress of the church and Christ's kingdom. It will be perfect in the coming night of the church when suddenly, Christ shall come with saving power to the Jews and convert many of them and raise up many men like the Apostle Paul. “At night, he shall divide the spoil”. Let us always remember that God's timing in the bestowal of all of His blessings is perfect, whether in the morning of our lives or in the night. God is the God of all blessing. Praise Him for it with me, on this day, and every day.