

Made Strong By the Mighty God of Jacob (14)

The Life of Joseph

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Bible Text: Genesis 49:22-26
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We turn in God's word this morning to Genesis 49. Genesis 49. The text this morning is verses 22 through 26 which is the blessing of Jacob upon Joseph. We'll read the entire chapter.

1 And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days. 2 Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father. 3 Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: 4 Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch. 5 Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. 6 O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. 7 Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel. 8 Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. 9 Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? 10 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

And just by the way we've seen in that verse as we look at the life of Joseph, that that verse is pointing to Christ. It's a prophecy of the coming of Christ from the line of Judah. We continue our reading,

11 Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: 12 His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk. 13 Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon. 14 Issachar is a strong ass couching

down between two burdens: 15 And he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute. 16 Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. 17 Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward. 18 I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD. 19 Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last. 20 Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties. 21 Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words. 22 Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: 23 The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: 24 But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) 25 Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: 26 The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren. 27 Benjamin shall ravine as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil. 28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them. 29 And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a buryingplace. 31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah. 32 The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth. 33 And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.

Thus far we read God's word. This the text is verses 22 through 26.

22 Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: 23 The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: 24 But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) 25 Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: 26 The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost

bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.

Let's ask God's blessing on the preaching in prayer.

Father in heaven, may we hear and understand the truth of who thou art. And we pray, O Lord, that this word, then, may be spoken and preached in truth and that we may hear this truth so that the result would be that we as thy people would glorify and honor thee, the one who is Almighty God. We pray also, then, that our knowledge of thee, this knowledge that thou dost give, would comfort us and gives strength to us in the sufferings and hardships of this life that we face. We're thankful, Father, for the things that we have learned of thee through the life of Joseph. All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

I've made the claim as we've looked at the life of Joseph that the life of Joseph is not about Joseph but it's about the God of Joseph. That's been clear as we've looked at the life of Joseph, but that is especially clear as we come to the end of this series. I've one more sermon that I'm going to preach on Genesis 50, but as we come near to the end of this series, we see and understand that the life of Joseph is not about Joseph but it's about the God of Joseph. We saw that last week when we looked at Genesis 48 and the blessing that Jacob gave to the two sons of Joseph, and we saw there the focus on God and who he is. Now we especially see that today and the blessing that Jacob gives to his son Joseph. It's about God and the things that he has done, and we'll see that next when we look at Genesis 50:20 and Joseph's own confession about his life to his brothers, "Ye meant it for evil but God meant it for good." Again, it's all about God. So as we come to the end of our consideration of the life of Joseph, may we then say in response, "How great is the God of our fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph?" Because the life of Joseph has been a testimony of the love and the faithfulness of our covenant God.

Now we've learned some things about this history. We've learned some things about Joseph and his brothers that maybe we didn't understand before or see before as clearly as we do now, but the important thing is that we've learned about the one true and living God, the God who we serve, the God of our fathers. In Genesis 49, Jacob has called all of his sons to come around his deathbed. He knows that he's soon going to die. He's very weak. He's 147 years old. And as he calls his sons around the deathbed, he does that for a purpose and we read of that at the beginning of chapter 49. We read Jacob saying to his sons, "Gather yourselves together that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days." Jacob is not simply going to tell them the things that happened in their life, no, he's going to tell them about what it is that God is going to do. He's giving prophecy here. God is speaking through Jacob to his sons and the focus of that is especially on Christ, the coming of Christ, the coming of the Messiah. We see that in verse 10 where Jacob promises to Judah the coming of the Messiah from his line, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." That's speaking there of Christ.

And so the focus of what Jacob says is the coming of Christ and we have to keep that in mind this morning as we look at what Jacob says concerning Joseph. But there's one

other thing that we should understand as we look at these words of Jacob concerning Joseph and that applies to everything he says to all of his sons, is that, again, there's this interplay between the past and the future, there's a connection between the past and the future. You see that with all of the boys. You see that with Reuben, the oldest, calls him unstable as water, "thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch." We've seen already that Reuben committed incest. He slept with one of Jacob's wives. So you see, there's the paths there in what Jacob says about Reuben, but it affects the future, it has something to say about the future as well. Well, the same thing in the words that we consider this morning concerning Joseph. There's something about the past and what God has done in his life, but it says something about the future as well, the future not only in Joseph's family but for us today, for the church today that are saved by Jesus Christ.

And so we have to remember that as we look at this passage this morning, there are things we learn from Joseph's life, there's an overview of Joseph's life given here that has something to say to us as we go forward in the future in our lives, and this is what we learn: we learn about the hand of the mighty God of Jacob, and that that hand of the mighty God of Jacob gave strength to Joseph so that he was fruitful under fire. The only explanation for Joseph being fruitful under fire was the mighty hand of the God of Jacob. And as God worked in Joseph's life, we can be assured that God also will work in our lives and the life of his people in Jesus Christ. So we consider this morning the text under the theme "Made Strong By the Mighty God of Jacob." We have this, first, fruitful under fire. So that describes Joseph's life. The explanation of that is the mighty God of Jacob, that's our second point. And then finally, the future blessings that are promised.

Fruitful under fire. That is the way that Jacob describes the life of Joseph, entire life of Joseph described, really, that way, fruitful under fire. That's the idea of the beginning verses of the text. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him." So we have the idea of a fruitful branch of a tree and then also the idea of archers who are shooting their arrows. So you have two figures here, two metaphors that belong together that are describing the life of Joseph as fruitful under fire.

The first metaphor here is that Joseph was fruitful in his life like the branch of a tree that is growing by a well, that has a water source and that grows and bears fruit. The idea is that this branch grows over the wall of the well and it is fruitful and does bear fruit. Literally, the text says this, the son, the son of a fruitful tree is Joseph, a son of a true fruitful tree over a fountain, daughters run over the wall. Okay, so that word that we have translated here as "bough" or "branch" literally is "son," and saying that Joseph is the son of a fruitful tree. That's saying that Joseph in his life was fruitful and that's a description that you find in scripture for God's people, not just here, but in many other places as well. You have that in Psalm 1, God's people are described as a tree by the riverside. You have that in Jeremiah 17, God's people as a fruitful tree living in the desert, and because there's a water source for that tree, it bears fruit and it does not wither away. You have that in the New Testament, John 15 where we are called branches that live out of the

vine, the trunk which is Jesus Christ himself. So this is a figure, a metaphor that you find throughout the scriptures.

So also Joseph was like a tree planted in the desert. He was. He was like a tree planted in the desert, the desert of his own family, at first, with all the wickedness of his brothers and the hatred of his brothers. And then a more intense desert when he was sold into slavery in Egypt and there he lived in this wicked land and in this wicked culture, and yet Joseph at home and in Egypt, was a fruitful branch that was growing and thriving. But in that, Joseph was under attack. His life was like being constantly shot at by archers with their arrows, constantly shooting arrows at him in his life. Joseph had spiritual enemies and real physical enemies in his life, but through all of these attacks, the point of the text is, Joseph remained fruitful, and that he was fruitful means that he continued to trust in God. He continued his life focused on God. He continued obeying God in his life.

He did not waver from that in his life, and we see that specifically in the life of Joseph, when you put that description together with the events of his life that we have looked at. Remember how he was constantly under attack in his life as he grew up in his own home, he was under the attack of his brothers, his brothers who hated him and in their hatred they would mock him, in their envy they would call him the dreamer. They were angry at the fact that he had that coat of many colors and that he was promoted in the family business, and so they made plans, then finally, first to kill him but when these murderers didn't have the guts to go through with that plan, they decided to sell him to those Ishmaelite traders and then he was sold as a slave into Egypt. We see that Joseph was under attack and he was under attack in Egypt. Potiphar's wife, remember her. At first she was trying to seduce him and when he wouldn't do what she wanted him to do, then she made-up the lie that he was the one trying to seduce her, and because of that Joseph was thrown into prison. But there the ongoing attack there in Egypt as Joseph was hated there by spiritual enemies. We saw this especially when he rose to power. When he had power and wealth and important position in Egypt, that was a dangerous place for him to be. Satan was working on him there so he would be depart from God and his ways. Satan was trying to tempt with all the allurements of Egypt. That's the way in which Joseph was under attack. But he was fruitful. He was fruitful.

That's the one thing striking about the life of Joseph, you never read about Joseph that he fell into some great seep sin that had control of him. It doesn't mean that Joseph never sinned, certainly he sinned. He had a sinful nature just like you and I have a sinful nature, but we never read of that in Joseph's life. He remained faithful to God. He did not respond to his brothers in the way of bitterness and resentment and hatred. He didn't respond to God that way. We never read that Joseph was angry at God for the suffering he had in his life although he was the one in the family who was walking in obedience. When his brothers came back and they repented and God had changed them, he forgave his brothers. He loved them. He showed concern for their souls. That's what was most important to him that his brothers were changed, that God had changed their hearts. He trusted in God's ways. He believed in the sovereignty of God. That's what it means that Joseph was fruitful under fire, he was fruitful in his response to the fire that he experienced in his life.

This fruitfulness under fire is amazing. It's amazing. If we didn't know the entire story and we just saw what happened to Joseph and didn't look at it from the perspective that the scriptures give to us, we would expect something completely different out of Joseph. We'd expect someone who is blaming his brothers for what they have done to him, who's giving excuses for living an ungodly life in the land of Egypt. You'd see, maybe you'd expect to see a man who was lashing out at others, a man who had an anger that was welling up in the depths of his heart and soul and that was living out of that. But you don't find that. Joseph was fruitful under fire.

But now Jacob speaks these words to give hope and encouragement to Joseph's family and to the church yet today. Remember that connection between the past and the future. It's not just about the past, it's not just giving an overview of Joseph's life so we understand it, it's saying something for us, to us in our lives right now and for the future as we go forward. It's saying to us there will be fire in our lives, but by the grace of God we will be fruitful under fire. That's what Jacob was saying to Joseph's family, saying to his family, "There will be fire in your lives. There's going to be hardship in your lives. You're going to continue to be under attack in your lives, but you will remain fruitful as you go through that fire. You will not be destroyed spiritually." And that's God's word to us, too. There will be fire in our lives. There will be hurt. There will be grief, even maybe similar hurt and grief that Joseph experienced in his life, hurt and grief that came from his own family, those who are supposed to be the closest to him. And maybe some of us know that, the hurt that comes from a husband or a wife and the things that they've said. Maybe it's the hurt that comes from parents or hurt that comes from children, the things that they've said and the things that they've done. It's the attacks that have come by words and by deed. Maybe we've suffered that awful abuse. Joseph was abused by his brothers, by his family. Maybe we've been on the receiving end of that. That's an awful fire.

I've said many times there may be not a worse suffering in this life than to be under that kind of suffering in this life, but the enemy behind that, remember, is Satan who wants to draw us further and further away from God and his people. He wants us to think that God is far away from us, that God is betraying us, that God does not show favor and kindness to us. He wants us to think that our past or our present sufferings are the evidence that God does not love us. And Satan attacks us in many other ways, too, with all of the sin and ungodliness of the world around us, trying to get us to depart from God and his truth that we would become addicted to the things of this world, to sinful behavior itself. We're under attack. We face this fire in this life and the temptation, the temptation is that there would be growing bitterness and resentment and anger, that we would respond to suffering in that way. But as children of God who are united to Jesus Christ, we are fruitful under fire. That means we don't respond according to our feelings, according to what we want to do, but we learn to respond in faith and in obedience. You see, fruitful is responding in a right way to the sufferings of life, trusting in God and obeying him. The opposite of being fruitful is responding in bitterness, resentment, and anger to these hardships and difficulties in life.

This does not mean we'll never have to face these feelings or desires. It does not mean we'll never struggle with them. Anybody who's gone through hardship, especially the fire of being hurt by other people, knows it's a great struggle not to fall into that bitterness, resentment, and anger. It's hard. It is a struggle. But by the grace of God we will be fruitful. We'll respond to suffering with godly characteristics. We'll remember that vengeance belongs to God. We'll remember that God is sovereign. We will see what his sovereignty means for our lives, and we will know and believe, as well, that we must obey God and trust in him and everything that he does. We'll remember even that we're called to love those who hurt us as Jesus commanded us to do in Matthew 5.

Fruitful under fire, that describes Joseph, that describes God's people. How could Joseph be fruitful under fire? How can we be fruitful under fire? The clear testimony of the text is that only God can do this. Jacob, in the words that he speaks to Joseph, says that the source of strength for Joseph in his life is the hand of the mighty God of Jacob, and what we want to see is that Jacob emphasizes in what he says, he emphasizes the power of God. He emphasizes the truth of God, but a specific truth about God. He emphasizes the power of God. Notice that in verses 24 and 25, "But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands," or literally the strength of his hands, "were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty." Notice an emphasis there on the power of God. First of all, the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. So using the concept of a hand, a strong hand, that's the hand of God, and it's mighty. The mighty God of Jacob. Stone of Israel, that emphasizes strength as well. When there's hardship and difficulty leaping to the rock that is higher than I. Rock is a place of strength and protection. And then in verse 25, "and by the Almighty." That word there "Almighty" in Hebrew is Shaddai. Maybe you've heard of that name, that Hebrew name El Shaddai. El is God, Shaddai is power or strength. That's one of the outstanding names of God in the Old Testament, emphasizing the power of God. And so that's the emphasis here, Jacob, his words. How could Joseph be fruitful under fire? How can we be fruitful under fire? The source of that strength is found in the Almighty God, El Shaddai.

What does it mean that God is Almighty? That he is Almighty God. It means that he is all powerful. That doesn't simply mean that he's the strongest. Kids, maybe that's the way you think about God, maybe that's the way we as adults think about God, too. He's the strongest. He's stronger than me. He's stronger than all of us. He's stronger than Satan. He's stronger than all the powers of darkness. Well, that's true, God is stronger and he is the strongest but that's not all that it means when we say that God is Almighty. It means more than that. That God is Almighty means he is the source and the giver of all power and strength. Now we know the great power of God, he's the Creator of the heavens and the earth, he's the God who rules over everything in the entire world moment by moment, we can't even imagine the power that it takes to do such a thing. We have a hard enough time keeping track of the things that are going on in our own lives, but God rules over it all, he knows it all, he's controlling all things and accomplishing his purpose in everything that happens. Amazing power.

We see that power in salvation, powerful work of the Spirit to make those who are dead alive. The powerful work of Jesus Christ in the cross of Calvary. Amazing power that's seen there at the cross, but we have to remember and understand we consider that God is Almighty that he's the source and strength of all power, even the powers of darkness, the power that Satan himself has. He has no power in the darkness, has no power apart from God himself. He gives us strength. He's a source of strength, physical strength for our bodies, yes, but spiritual strength as well. And so God is this God of power. He's Almighty. He's El Shaddai. That's the emphasis of Jacob, and therefore this Almighty God, he is able to accomplish all that he wills and promises to do. There's nothing too hard for God. There's nothing that is impossible for God to do. We know that. We believe that. Sometimes the hard thing is to get that from the head to the heart. The Spirit has to do that, of course. What I mean by that is that sometimes we give up hope. We lose all hope. But that means we're not believing that God is Almighty, that he can do amazing and powerful things, and that's why we must not give up hope, because we believe that we have a God who is able to do all things.

That's the power that we see in Jacob's life and in Joseph's life. That's what Jacob is testifying of, the power of God in his own life, "The mighty God of Jacob," he says and now he's saying that that's the power that was working in Joseph's life. Now we have to understand that power rightly. There are many who don't understand it rightly and that leads to a wrong view of God. They look at suffering in this life and they say, "Well, if there is a God why does he allow so much suffering?" And easily we can begin to have that concept of God, too, that God in his power ought to by that power keep us from suffering in our lives. That's not what God does in his great power. He doesn't show his power by keeping us from all suffering. He does keep us from some suffering. We aren't to have the fullness or the worst of all the suffering that there is in this world, there's only one who had that, and that's our Lord Jesus Christ. But that's not what God does in our lives keeping us from suffering, but instead by his power he preserves his people in faith and in godliness as they go through suffering which is under his control. The power of God is seen in this: it's seen in this power to bless as we go through great suffering in our lives.

Just think about that for a moment from the perspective of the life of Joseph, just looking back in the life of Joseph a minute. If we would expect that God in his power would keep suffering from Joseph in his life, that the story would be written completely different, wouldn't it? It would be completely different as it happened to Joseph in his life. Then Joseph would maybe be thrown down in the pit by his brothers and then Reuben would come along and get him out of the pit, or someone else would come along and let him go, or the Ishmaelite traders would buy him and then set him free and he would return home, and then the brothers would try again and then he would escape again, and then he wouldn't go down to Egypt. He wouldn't even have to face Potiphar's wife. He wouldn't even have to be in prison there because God's just delivering him out of all suffering in his life. That's not the way in which God does things. We have to see that in our own lives, too, in the suffering that we have, that God is determined to show his power as we're under fire, as we're going through great suffering.

But now there's something else to understand about the power of God as it's revealed here by Jacob in this passage. We have to understand the attitude of God towards his people as he exercises that power. As God works powerfully, what does he accomplish? Is it in the service of destruction and judgment? Or is it in the service of salvation and then favor for his people? Well, what we see and understand in the life of Joseph is that that power was exercised in the life of Joseph for his salvation. It was the way in which God was exercising power to show favor to Joseph in his life, and that's evident from the text as well. There's a few parts to the text that we didn't look at yet, but they're related to the power of God that's revealed here. Notice that it speaks there of God as the shepherd in verse 24, and then, "Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee." God in his power is described here as a shepherd and a helper. He's a powerful shepherd and a powerful helper.

What a shepherd he is for his people, a shepherd who does what's best for the sheep. A shepherd who loves the sheep that he's chosen to be his own from eternity. The shepherd who has given his only begotten Son to be the Good Shepherd of his people, who laid down his life for his people. He's a shepherd who cares for his people, his sheep. And he so loves them, he delivers them. When they do go astray in their sin, he's constantly delivering them and giving to them all that they need in Jesus Christ.

He's our helper and the rock of our salvation. He is. What a God he is, the God who is powerful in his salvation, a God as well who is faithful to his covenant promises in the generations. That's what we see in the life of Joseph, how God in his love for Joseph powerfully worked to preserve him and protect him so that he was faithful under fire. And that's what God does in our lives, too. He's powerful but don't forget he's powerful as a shepherd who loves his sheep. He's powerful as our helper who helps us in all of our struggles and in all of our hardships. The text here really is speaking of the irresistible grace of God, the saving strength and the power of the God of our salvation.

Now the text describes how this Almighty God, El Shaddai, works in our lives when Jacob describes how God worked powerfully in Joseph's life. So we put this together now is what we do. We've got to take that together, the truth of God and his great power and how that fits with the fact that Joseph was fruitful under fire and the text speaks to that. Verse 24, "But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands," that's the arms of the hands of Joseph, "were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." What the text is saying is that the strength for Joseph in his life so that he was fruitful under fire, was the strength and the power of Almighty God. It was God working in him and through him, that Joseph had no strength in his hands of himself to do what was right and to trust in God but it was God who was there, as it were, holding his hands, giving him strength in his very hands so that he lived in the way that he did.

As we look at the life of Joseph, we don't praise Joseph this morning for his right response to suffering in his life, what we do is we praise God for what he worked in Joseph, and that's what you find throughout scripture, that testimony of the powerful work of God. It's really described more fully in the New Testament. We see that in Galatians 2:20. There are a few passages I want to look at. Galatians 2:20, Paul describes

the power of God in Jesus Christ working in his life, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." What Paul is saying is that his ability to trust in God, his ability to do what was right, was found in this: that Christ was living in him. The power of God was found in his heart and in his life because Christ lived in him.

You find that in the book of Philippians, too. Philippians also. You do find it in Philippians 2: 12 and 13. The end of 12 there's that command, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Verse 13 then, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Then Philippians 4:13, a beautiful verse there, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." So Paul is saying his strength is all in Christ and in Christ alone. It's the strength and the power of God himself who is the Almighty God of our salvation.

We understand how God works in us and that's revealed here in the text. It's not like a computer that's programmed and it just does it. It's not like a puppeteer who's controlling a puppet. No, that's not how God works. No, it's our hands made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob so that we're working and we're active and God is working in and through us. What God does is he works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. We've been created as moral rational creatures and God works in us in that way so that he's changing our hearts and changing our wills so that we seek after him and we desire him, and then as we're motivated in gratitude to God for all that he's done, we're working to trust in him and to obey his word and his commandments.

But the strength is found in God alone. We can do nothing in our own strength, that we respond rightly to suffering in our lives is only because God does it. But let's understand this about that work of God: it's not a work of God that happens all at once. In our suffering it usually happens very slowly this work of God. There may be some of us right now, we're struggling to see God and his power in the circumstances that we're facing right now. We're struggling to see it. We're struggling in our faith. We're struggling in our walk. It doesn't seem like there's much hope for what we're going through. The text is not saying to us that we will never struggle and we shouldn't judge the life of Joseph and say, "How come he never struggled with this? It just seems so easy." We shouldn't make that judgment of Joseph. We don't know that. In fact, when you look at the scriptures and you look especially at the Psalms, you find that God's people, they came to see and know the truth of God but only after great struggle, and in fact, such great struggle that they were questioning God in ways that we wouldn't dare, at least not outwardly and openly, but here it's written in the scriptures. And they're wondering about the favor of God. They're wondering about the kindness of God. They're asking God where it has gone. They're asking God why he's not judging their enemies. Why he's not taking them away. They're struggling through this, but when you get to the end of those Psalms, you find that they see the light.

But it was only through great struggle. Some of you right now may be in the midst of that struggle. Others of you have been in that struggle in the past and you've come through.

I've heard the struggle described this way. Sometimes we like the easy way. We want to see the light and so we chase the light, and using the figure of the sun we'll go towards the west. We want the light of the sun but the problem is, if you chase the sun, you'll never catch up to it. It always gets dark. But the way to see the light is to go through the darkness. Go to the east. We don't like to go through the darkness, that's the suffering and the hardship and the struggle of it all. It's a great struggle but the confidence that we have to rest in is that in the power of God we will be preserved so that we will be fruitful under fire through that great struggle because our hands are in the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. We're not called to try and figure out everything that God is doing, not when we're in the darkness, we're called to trust in him, trust in those hands of the mighty God of Jacob.

But also, we trust that there will be future blessings. Future blessings. Jacob speaks of that in the text. This mighty God "who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren." These blessings of which Jacob speaks are blessings of fruitfulness, fruitful especially in the generations. You see the idea of blessings of the womb and blessings of the breasts, that's fruitfulness. That's the idea there and that's what Jacob is saying to Joseph, that there will be these blessings, fruitfulness, fruitfulness in your family. Your sons will grow up into great tribes of Israel. We looked at that in Genesis 48, that double birthright blessing, and Joseph received that on his two sons. They would be two tribes of Israel, and they would be great among the tribes of Israel. In addition to that, they would have land in Canaan. They would go back to the Promised Land of Canaan, and there would be a double blessing upon Joseph in that. And these blessings that Joseph already sees are greater than what Abraham and Isaac saw, that's the idea of progenitors, greater than what their progenitors, their ancestors saw. Jacob and Joseph are seeing a seed that is greater than Abraham and Isaac saw.

But what's striking about this blessing that is pronounced on Joseph, is that it's related to his being separate from his brothers so that at the end of verse 26, "they shall be on the head of Joseph and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren." The beautiful truth is that his being separate, his going through all that suffering would not keep Joseph from the blessings that God would give to him in the land of Canaan. Beautiful truth, but now that truth of these blessings is not just related to Canaan, it's not just related to his sons, it's not just related to the fruitfulness of his family, but what is promised to Joseph here is something so much higher for the text speaks of the everlasting hills, or literally the desire of the hills of eternity. What God promises to Joseph is the blessings of the new heavens and new earth, the blessings that would come to the Shiloh, the Shiloh that was promised from the line of Judah. You see, all these blessings, and even this very word, is all related to that blessing, to the line of Judah, that the Savior would come, that Christ would come, the Messiah would come, and in him there are blessings for all of God's people. In him all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

That was the encouraging promise that was given to Joseph at the end of his father's life, but now we can be assured of blessings, too. In the sufferings of this life, we must hear the promise of God of the blessings that are ours in Jesus Christ. Amazing blessings. We experience them in part already. We know the forgiveness of our sins. We know fellowship with God. We experience the sanctifying work of God in us. We have the life of Jesus Christ living in us. And also we have the hope of the fullness of blessings in the new heavens and new earth because Jesus Christ has earned those blessings for us. We know those blessings. We love those blessings. We want those blessings of God, don't we? But now hear this: all the suffering we go through will not separate us from those blessings, that we go through suffering does not mean we won't have those blessings, but the word of God to us is as we go through suffering God will hold us in his hands. We're in the hands of the mighty God of Jacob and that God who's preserving and protecting us, is bringing us to have those blessings, the fullness of those blessings in Jesus Christ. Nothing can separate us from the love of God and nothing can separate us from these blessings that Jesus Christ has earned for us.

That's the big picture that we see here as we look at the life of Joseph and we see that all the suffering he went through did not keep him from being blessed of the Lord, and we can be assured of that, too. Whatever suffering you're dealing with right now, whatever darkness you may find yourself in, whatever darkness you've been in, it will not keep you from the blessings that are yours in Jesus Christ. May we love those blessings and believe those blessings are ours. Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father in heaven, we are so thankful for this word that thou hast given us today concerning the blessings that are ours in Jesus Christ and blessings that will not be taken away and that we cannot be separated from, and that's because we are found in Jesus Christ. We pray that in the sufferings and hardships of this life that we may find our strength in the mighty hand of the God of Jacob, and may we know that we are held by that hand and strengthened by that hand, and give us, then, grace and strength to respond in a right way by trusting in thee and obeying thy word and commandments. Continue to bless us in our fellowship this morning and return us here in this evening that we may worship thee again, giving glory and praise to thy name. In Jesus' name do we pray. Amen.

Introduction

- I. The life of Joseph is not about Joseph, but about the God of Joseph.
- II. In Genesis 49, Jacob called all his sons together to his deathbed "that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days."

The Life of Joseph

14. Made Strong by the Mighty God of Jacob

I. **Fruitful under Fire**

- A. The amazing, but true, overview of Joseph's life is that he was fruitful under fire.

- B. Jacob speaks these words to give hope and encouragement to Joseph's family and to the church yet today.

II. **The Mighty God of Jacob** - how could Joseph be fruitful under fire?

- A. Jacob says that the source of strength for Joseph in his life is the mighty God of Jacob.

- B. The text describes how Almighty God, El Shaddai, works in our lives when Jacob describes how God worked powerfully in Joseph's life.

III. **Future Blessings**

- A. God promises future blessings on Joseph in vs. 25, 26.

- B. In the sufferings of our life, we must hear the promise of God of the blessings that are ours in Jesus Christ.