

Hope—When the Mantle Is Transferred

Genesis 35:27-29

Halifax: 4 September 2016, 10:30 AM

Introduction:

For the last three Sundays, we have been looking at Genesis 35 which is a transitional chapter between the *to-le-doth* of Isaac and the *to-le-doth* of Jacob.

- As I showed you last week,
 - *To-le-doth* is the Hebrew word that means *generations* or *genealogy*.
 - This word *to-le-doth* is used to present each new section in Genesis.
 - Interestingly, each time the *to-le-doth* of a man is announced, the material that follows is about his adult sons.
 - For example, since Genesis 25:19, we have been looking at the *to-le-doth* of Isaac even though the main focus has been on Jacob...
 - And when we get to chapter 37, we will begin the section on the *to-le-doth* of Jacob and it will be about his adult sons.
 - So chapter 35 is the place where the *to-le-doth* of Isaac closes out in preparation for the *to-le-doth* of Esau in chapter 36—which is only a brief section;
 - and the *to-le-doth* of Jacob—which is announced in Genesis 37:2 and which will continue for 14 chapters until the end of the book of Genesis!
- So you see that with chapter 35, the *to-le-doth* of Isaac is wrapped up to prepare for, primarily, the *to-le-doth* of Jacob.
 - And this is very important because it is Jacob's family—all twelve of his sons—who are to be the fathers of the nation of Israel.
 - Unlike Isaac's family where only Jacob continued in God's house and Esau was cut off, with Jacob, all twelve sons continue into the future with the promises of God and the care of God as His people.

But what is the value of spending as much time as we have looking at Genesis 35—at this transitional chapter where we see how God prepares Jacob's house to go into the next generation?

- It is just this—that in looking at how the LORD prepared Jacob's house, we can learn about how God prepares each generation of His people to go into the next.
 - One of the most remarkable things about God's people—the people who embrace His redemptive revelation and who know Him as their God—
 - is the fact that they are still going on after all these years!
 - If God had not been with us, we would have disappeared long ago!
 - And by looking at how Jacob's family, which of course is Israel, is preserved, we are given hope for the church today...
 - As we have seen, they were so spiritually weak and fragile—just like we are—but they were kept by the power of God!
 - This is the history of the entire church through all ages!
 - We continue because God keeps us!
 - We have no grounds to be proud—only to be thankful!

So let the record of God's preparing of Jacob's house stir you up to both thanksgiving and hope for God's faithful preparation of each new generation of His people!

- Three weeks ago, we saw how He brought Jacob's house to repentance and renewal, calling them back to Bethel where Jacob had first met God and where he had promised to worship God.
 - By calling him back, God gave Jacob assurance that He was still with him and was committed to bless him,
 - and He showed that He expected him to keep on serving Him,
 - Jacob responded with beautiful repentance and hope, having his family put away all their idols and come to worship the Lord.
 - How thankful we should be that God ever calls us back to Himself and assures us that He is still with us to bless us too!
- Two weeks ago, we saw how God purged Jacob of the idol that he had made of his wife Rachel.
 - God brought her to her end in this world as she gave birth to their second son.
 - Jacob was deeply grieved, but he responded with hope, naming the boy *Benjamin*, showing that he was trusting in God's promise to bless his seed.
 - How thankful we should be that God ever purges us from idols—some times with very hard things—but all for the furtherance of His kingdom.
- And then last week, we saw how God, in His sovereign providence, set the stage for Jacob's family to learn about gospel grace in the rising generation!
 - The stage is set by the growing strife and division in Jacob's house that the LORD does *not* correct because He has a grand purpose for it.
 - We saw how Rueben, who was Jacob's firstborn son, resented the fact that Jacob showed such favouritism to Rachel and her sons.
 - He asserted his right in the pagans did by taking Jacob's concubine in incestuous adultery.
 - We saw also how the family of Jacob was then listed according to which of his wives they were born of, emphasising the division as they go into the future.
 - But the LORD does not correct this division because He is going to use it that Joseph might be revealed as a type of Christ,
 - saving Israel even though they had so grievously sinned against Him...
 - And that Judah might be revealed as the forerunner of Christ who, like Christ would do, offers himself to save his brother Benjamin...
- And now, this week, we are going to see the final preparation for the next generation—how the mantle of Isaac is transferred to Jacob.
 - You may have heard people speak of the mantle being passed.
 - That is an expression that comes from the day when Elisha took the mantle of Elijah and began to carry out Elijah's work after he was taken to glory.

- When someone takes up the office of another, it is said that he takes up the mantle, or you could say that the mantle is transferred to him.
- When Jacob's father Isaac dies, the responsibility of being the chief patriarch falls upon Jacob.
- Whenever one generation passes on in the church of Jesus Christ, another comes along to take of the mantle.
 - I know that I am starting to feel the weight of that as the generation above me starts to die off—men like Bill Campbell in our Presbytery—and I more and more find myself in the oldest generation.
 - It can make you feel very small and insufficient.
 - There is a lot of security in having a generation above you...
 - But our hope must be in the LORD.

Well, let us read our text beginning in Genesis 35:27.

- Please attend carefully because this is the Word of God.

Genesis 35:27-29: Then Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had dwelt. Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, *being* old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

May the LORD bless the reading of His holy Word.

In looking at these verses, I want to reflect on three things that the Lord does when He passes the mantle to the next generation—

- three things He does so that His church will keep on going from generation to generation without failing.

- I. First, that He furnishes the rising generation with the lasting influence of their fathers' example.**
- II. Second, that He lays on the rising generation the responsibility to lead His church.**
- III. Third, that He reminds us that it is He who keeps us.**

Let's begin with the first...

- I. He furnishes the rising generation with the lasting influence of their fathers' example.**

A. What a great help Jacob had in his father's example.

1. We are told in verse 27 of how Jacob was able to visit his father in his old age.
 - Many suppose that he visited him many times, but that this speaks of him dwelling with him for a time.
 - In any case, he was able to visit with this godly old man who had walked with the Lord for so many years.
2. What memories must have flooded Jacob's mind!

- a. He knew well of his father Isaac's sins...
 - He had grown up with the pain of having a twin brother who was very decidedly his father's favourite.
 - He knew how Isaac had even tried to resist what the LORD had revealed that Jacob was the son through whom the blessing would come.
 - Jacob even has come to understand how wrong it was for Isaac to treat the blessing as something to strive over...
 - That it was a gift of God to their family, and that Isaac should have led his family to rejoice the saviour of the world was to come to their family through Jacob...
 - It should have set the family to praying for Jacob and supporting him as the one who would shoulder this great responsibility and privilege.
 - The focus should have been on the blessing itself instead of on who got to be the son through whom the blessing would come.
 - Jacob knew of the sorrow that had come to him and his family through his father's poor leadership in those years...
 - b. Jacob also knew of how he himself had grievously sinned in grasping for the blessing and in deceiving his father and exploiting his brother's weakness.
 - Of course Isaac knew of all of this too...
 - c. But besides all of this, Jacob knew how much his father Isaac had changed!
 - He knew how Isaac had repented and had, after he realised that he had blessed Jacob,
 - accepted the fact that it was God's doing and that he could not control the blessing and where it went.
 - This was completely in God's hands, and instead of trying to control God, it was his duty to receive what God gave with thanksgiving.
3. What sweet fellowship Jacob must his father must have had now as his father drew near to his departure from this world.
 - a. Jacob himself had, as we have seen in this very chapter, only recently been humbled himself...
 - Very much like Isaac, he had been brought to realise that his hope was not found in controlling God, but in receiving the free grace of God!
 - Perhaps they spoke about these things—perhaps they did not need to speak about them—perhaps it was enough to simply be together.
 - b. And here Jacob must have had great comfort in the old man who had learned these lessons so many years before he had...
 - All through Jacob's restless years in Padan Aram and in Shechem, Isaac had been quietly trusting the LORD...
 - knowing that the precious promises of a kingdom of righteousness that would come to him and his house through Jacob would come.

- All those years of Jacob's striving and prayerlessness, the old man had been like an anchor holding on to the promises...
 - even as his father Abraham had done when Isaac had been restless and prayerless.
- B. My brothers and sisters, what an encouragement it is to have fathers in the faith who serve as anchors for us!
1. They have a way of keeping us on track.
 - The church has a heritage, and these godly old saints are the ones who hold to the promises—in a sense, they hold to them for us—as an example, as an anchor to keep the church from letting go of them.
 - These fathers stabilise us and, as Psalm 127 says, they shoot us out as arrows...
 - They help us settle into the promises with them so that after they are gone, we are able to carry the faith into the next generation.
 - What a blessing it is to have godly fathers to send us out in the right direction!
 - It would have been an even greater blessing for Jacob if he had a godly father from his youth,
 - but how thankful he must have been now that God had made his father into a godly man—and that Jacob had this heritage.
 - He was, in a sense, ready to carry the future of faith in God for the household of God.
 2. Now some of you, I know, do not have godly fathers...
 - You have fathers who never learned to trust in God
 - They shot you out in the wrong direction, and you feel their pull and their influence on you this day—
 - pulling you to a complaining, despairing, manipulating, anxious spirit without hope in God.
 - It is a vexation to you.
 - But rejoice if God had rescued you and called you to believe...
 - If He has revealed His Son Jesus Christ to you, and has shown you that you are not left to make your own way,
 - but that it is for you to look to the Lord for forgiveness and eternal life in His blessed kingdom, the fullness of which is yet to come.
 - Rejoice in that above all—and also recognise that you do have fathers in the faith! Spiritual fathers!
 - You are not in the church in the days when there is but one man on earth who carries the faith to the next generation—as Jacob was...
 - You are in a time when there are many godly saints that have gone before you...

- and if you are young, many that you may look up to and whose faith you may follow as they follow Christ.
- You can have the sweet lasting impression of these that held on to God in their old age when you become the senior generation.
 - And you have them now to direct you and to shoot you out in the right direction.
 - They serve as anchors for the church in our day, holding on to the Lord in faith when we are weak and restless!
 - Praise the LORD!

TRANS> What a great encouragement it is to go into the next generation knowing that our gracious God raises up anchor men to be fathers to the church in every generation.

- How thankful we should be for them...
 - Now let's move along to our second point...

II. That our faithful God lays on the rising generation the tremendous responsibility of leading His church...

- **of being those anchor men in the next generation.**

A. The day comes when, like Jacob, we see our fathers advance to glory.

- We read the sober words of verse 29: **So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, being old and full of days.**

1. It is a time of sorrow mingled with joy.

- Sorrow because they leave us here in the world alone—
 - Because the comfort of their example and their steadiness is gone.
 - Sorrow because we love them and we will miss them.
 - Sorrow because we can no longer share our joys and burdens with them.

2. But joy for their sake because we have tremendous hope!

a. Hope that they have, as the text says, been gathered to their people...

- Isaac was able to go to be with Abraham, his beloved father whom he had not seen for so long.
- He was able to be gathered to Noah and to all the other saints that had gone before—to his dear wife Rebekah...
- He was set free from sin, able to see clearly all that is true, all that lovely...
 - able to fully understand the promise of Christ that was to come and the blessings of heavenly glory!

b. And not only that, but Jacob buried him in hope of the resurrection.

- We spoke about that recently—that from ancient times,
 - the faithful of God's people have buried their dead to express the hope they have that their bodies will be raised again.

- Many pagans have followed this practice as well from Noah, but gradually, various customs and superstitions around death have arisen that greatly distorted the simple hope of the faithful.
 - But Jacob had this hope of resurrection that had been renewed with the promises of God to Abraham and Isaac that they themselves would inherit Canaan,
 - even though they did not inherit it as long as they lived!
 - even though God told them that their descendants would not receive the land until after four centuries and their time of suffering in Egypt.
 - They trusted that God would raise up their bodies and that then they would inherit that land.
3. And these promises are all just as good as they always were...in fact they are far more clear and certain...
- a. For now the promised Saviour has come and He has atoned for our sins...
 - And now we are promised that when we are gathered to our people, that He is there—Jesus Christ—that now we depart to be with Him!
 - b. And not only that, but we are told that He will come again with glory...
 - And that not only will Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob be raised up to inherit Canaan,
 - but that the whole church will be raised up to inherit the whole earth, gloriously renewed by the power of Christ who has authority through His death to eradicate the curse and to cast his enemies into the Lake of Fire.

TRANS> It is the same hope that Jacob had when he buried his dead, only more fully revealed to us!

B. But when we bury our fathers, we are then left to carry the weight—

1. The mantle falls on our shoulders and we feel its weight.
 - a. Brothers and sisters, I am starting to feel this responsibility laid on me!
 - I felt it when my wife Mary's father died.
 - He was the godly old anchor that held her brothers and sister and our family together.
 - He was a presence of godliness that we all had to answer to—just by being present—he didn't have to say anything.
 - How small, how frail, and how scattered I felt with Mary's siblings and their spouses.
 - We had lost an anchor.
 - My own father has long been dead—I did not feel it when he died as I was only nine—my mother did—
 - but now as she ages, I feel it more and more as she leans on me and my sisters more and more.

- And I feel this in our Presbytery...with the passing away of Bill Campbell—that godly father that prayed for all the churches...
 - that dear senior man that you did not want to disappoint—who was there as an anchor for us...
 - There are some men that are ten years older than I am, but they are peers to me—they are my generation—they are not fathers...
 - I feel weak and vulnerable—I feel like we are orphans.
 - I am not ready to be father—I am too young...
 - But more and more, even in our synod, the older generation is disappearing and I am in the generation that must bear the weight as the younger men run this way and that way.
 - b. Some of you in this congregation are also entering with me into that generation...
 - You are burying your parents, your children are growing into young adults, and you are the anchor—for them and for the church.
 - It is a heavy responsibility!
2. How poor Jacob must have felt it!
- a. It was to his family alone that the promises had been given.
 - He was the anchor that had to hold on to the Lord and his promises for the next generation—for his twelve sons...
 - How unfit he must have felt as he buried his father.
 - b. His brother Esau was a profane man...
 - He had no interest in God’s kingdom—only in the riches of this world.
 - He was there to weep with Jacob in the loss of their father, but he was a stranger to the hope and a stranger to the responsibility of carrying the faith to the next generation that was laid upon Jacob.
 - Poor Jacob had to carry this responsibility alone!
3. But I tell you, it is good to feel the weight of it and to feel our own weakness.
- If we thought we were up for the task, if we thought we were sufficient in ourselves,
 - we would certainly not be ready to do what we need to do...to teach the next generation to hold on to the promises of God in faith...
 - that our hope is not in ourselves, but in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 - Brothers and sisters, pray for the rising generation...
 - We feel like little children—we are not ready to bear this responsibility, but we have no choice—
 - The Lord has laid it on our shoulders.
 - Some of you younger men are not aliens to this of course—you bear it in your own way...

- When you left your parents and began to bear the responsibility of providing for yourself—you felt it...
 - Much more when you married and when you began bringing forth children who look to you and your wife more than to any other person as their example—as their anchor.
 - You must teach them to hold on to the Lord, to walk with Him, to trust in Him.
 - The responsibility is a very heavy one!
 - If you don't feel the weight, at whatever stage in life you are at, you do not understand your responsibility...
 - God has laid it upon you and you must carry it...
 - Do not avoid it—do not push it off on others—it is yours from the Lord.
 - Too many men do not want to ever grow up—they want to be boys—they want their wives to be their mothers—
 - they are men in diapers.

TRANS> But now we get to move from responsibility to look at the resources we have in our gracious LORD.

III. When the mantle is passed to us, the LORD reminds us that it is He who keeps His church from generation to generation.

- A. There is a tremendous encouragement in what happens here for Jacob—as he feels the weight of responsibility that has been put on him by the Lord.
1. Though Esau is not standing with Jacob to bear the burden of carrying the faith to the next generation...
 - The presence of Esau by his side as they bury their father together is a great encouragement for Jacob!
 - We have the words at the end, “And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.”

➤ What is so significant about this?
 2. Once again, what a flood of memories must have filled Jacob's mind as he stood next to his brother at his father's grave...
 - a. There was all the wrong that he had done against his brother...the deception, the outfoxing, the manipulation, the twisting...
 - And there was the memory of the hostility of his brother—the anger that caused him to say that as soon as Isaac died, he would kill Jacob.
 - There was the running away to Padan Aram to escape Esau...
 - There was the meeting of God at Bethel as he departed from the land, and the revelation to him that heaven was looking after him at the vision of the stairway...

- And the promise that the Lord would bring him back to Canaan safely and that he would bring forth the promised kingdom of righteousness and the salvation of the world.
- b. And now, here is Jacob beside Esau at his father’s grave—with no fear of the old threat!
- God had protected Jacob and brought him back safely just as He had promised...
 - There was the memory of how the LORD had delivered Jacob from Laban when Laban had wanted to kill him...
 - And there was the memory of how the LORD had brought Jacob to repentance for he had done to Esau and how Esau accepted his repentance.
 - He had obtained all the riches and independence he could ever ask for, and he was not competing with Jacob for the rights of the firstborn in their father’s house...
 - Jacob knew that it was not houses and lands, but a gracious kingdom that made the blessing great—
- c. But again, the way all this had come together was from the LORD, and Jacob knew it...
- It was to Jacob the assurance that the LORD was looking after him, and that He would preserve him and his sons as promised.
 - His safety was in the LORD, and he had nothing to fear.
 - God had even added to this assurance when recently He had made the Canaanites afraid of him when, humanly speaking, there was no cause for fear.
 - Though his family was small and weak, God had shown Jacob that He was keeping him.
 - Jacob could into the future with hope that God’s kingdom would come.
 - He would have many trials to face—he would see the loss of Joseph and would think him dead...
 - But as he will say on his own death bed,
 - **“I have waited for your salvation O LORD!”**
 - His hope was not in himself, but in the LORD.

TRANS> And here, standing shoulder to shoulder at his brother Esau’s side in peace with him, Jacob is reminded of God’s faithfulness...and so are we!

B. Brothers and sisters, this testimony of God’s faithfulness is a testimony to you too in God’s precious Word!

1. What is the threat that you are facing?
 - What is the burden that you are bearing?

- What is the weakness that you feel in your family, in the church as a whole, perhaps in your husband or your father—or in yourself?
 - What is the responsibility that God has laid on your shoulders that seems like it is too big for your shoulders?
 - What enemies do you face that threaten to destroy you and yours?
2. The God of Jacob is your refuge!
- The God of Jacob is your strength!
 - Lean on Him and He will bear you up in His everlasting arms!
 - His promises are sure!
 - His faithfulness endures forever!
 - His kingdom will never fail.
 - In your weakness, His strength is made perfect.
 - a. Little children, you do not need to be afraid—it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.
 - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, weak and pitiful as they were—each carried the faith into the next generation...
 - The twelve little sons of Jacob, weak and pitiful as they were—carried the faith into the future for God...
 - The twelve quivering disciples—weak and pitiful as they were—by God’s grace carried the faith into the next generation.
 - b. And perhaps even more amazing and more encouraging than that is the fact that despite all the church’s divisions, despite all her heresies, despite all her weakness and unfaithfulness, despite all her strong enemies...
 - she still is here today...
 - after all these years, she is still here blundering into the future, amazingly kept from generation to generation by the power of God.
 - What confidence is ours that He will continue to keep her.
 - We have the same promises and the same God to keep them.

3. The future is ours in Jesus Christ.

- Yes, I have described men of faith as anchors who carry the faith to the next generation...
 - But I tell you that Jesus Christ is the solid ground to which those anchors hold.
 - And the blessed Holy Spirit is the one that enables those anchors to hold on.
- The church will never fail.
 - She will arise in glory.
 - She will inherit all that God has promised.
- We can face the future with hope!