

Southport Presbyterian Church
Rev. Jim Capps
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Blessing Our Families
Genesis 49:22-28

As we focus our attention today on blessing our families, I want us to look at the bittersweet picture of the Old Testament character, Jacob. This takes place in Egypt after he and his family had been spared famine in Canaan.

In Genesis 48, Joseph gets the word that his father, Jacob is ill and takes his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh to see their grandfather. Jacob reiterates the story of how God blessed him at Luz in the land of Canaan, promised that his family would be fruitful, and that the land on which they were standing would be an everlasting possession for his descendents. Then he gives a special blessing to Joseph and his sons.

In Genesis 49, Jacob calls for the rest of his sons to gather around him in his weakened condition. What follows is the blessing of each of his sons based upon not only what they have been in the past, but also on what they will become in the future. Toward the end of the chapter, in verses 22-28, Jacob speaks words of blessing to his beloved son, Joseph. This is the son he thought was dead. Yet, not only was Joseph alive, but he was the one God used to save His chosen people. Follow along with me as I read Genesis 49:22-28.

Jacob's blessing of Joseph.

Jacob looks back on all that happened to Joseph whose early life was like a soap opera, almost too difficult to believe. His jealous brothers sold him into slavery. He was tempted and seduced by an Egyptian official's wife. He did time in jail. Yet, by God's grace, according to God's plan, Joseph became second in command in Egypt.

Jacob describes Joseph as "a fruitful vine near a spring whose branches climb over a wall." Even though presented with obstacles and persecution, he is able to transcend them and accomplish God's purpose for him.

Jacob in the waning hours of his life as he reflects on the happenings in Joseph's life realizes that it is God who has brought him to this point in time. It was "because of" the Mighty God of Jacob, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, your father's God who helps you, and the Almighty who blesses him. Jacob places the credit where the credit is due. It is God who has brought all of this about.

Even in the aloneness of a prison cell, it was his father's God who was blessing Joseph. When being falsely accused of wrong-doing, it was God who knew his frustration at the injustice of it all. It was God who raised him to a place of prominence to bring deliverance.

God's great blessings rest upon the head of Joseph. Jacob can see all this as He reflects on the past as well as projects into the future far past his own days on this earth.

It is important for us to give blessing to our families.

Whether parent to child, grandparent to grandchild, children and grandchildren to parents and grandparents, whatever the family connection, giving blessings is so important and crucial.

More than empty words of flattery about the past and grandiose dreams of a future, our blessings should be rooted in reality. Even though they must be hard words to speak as he described the past and looked toward the future of his sons, Jacob was being painfully honest as he blessed them.

Have you taken the time to recall the attributes and qualities of those people you love the most and shared them with them? Have you reflected upon God's activity in their lives and the way God has blessed you through them?

Have you dreamed with them about what they could become, giving them hope as they move into the future? At the recent Kairos weekend at Plainfield, there was a young man in his 20's in the group we called our family who had grown up in a tough area of our city. Once we had built a relationship, I found out that when he was young he had some great dreams, among them becoming a doctor someday.

As he experienced the realities of life all around him, he lost hope. While he didn't tell me why he was in prison, without a hope for a future, his life lacked meaning. On the last day of our time together, I had the privilege of seeing God begin to restore the hope he had lost in his childhood. While it would not be easy to be sure, he could, with God's help, still make something very special of his life. He might even become a doctor.

There was a different look in his eyes and his posture seemed to change. Some one older with white hair believed he could actually make something of his life. He wasn't doomed. There was hope. It was a kind of a blessing.

Dear friends, the important people in our lives need to receive honest blessings from us, reflecting on our past and looking into the future. While I don't remember the exact words anymore, I remember at my high school graduation party, my great grandfather gave me that kind of blessing as we sat together eating cake and ice cream.

Are there blessings you need to speak to those you love the most? Will you look for ways to affirm your loved one's past as well as giving him or her hope and encouragement for the future?

I recently read of a daughter who found her mother at the kitchen table reading the Bible and chuckling. When asked what was going on she said she had been reading Proverbs on a daily basis and was reading the last chapter about a virtuous woman. She was chuckling because she felt she could never become the woman described in that passage.

After further conversation, she decided to take one item on the list at a time. After mastering it she would move on. Several years later her daughter asked her how she was doing. She chuckled and said that she was only 7 or 8 items into the list. But she was currently stuck on the statement, "Her children shall call her blessed." She said she might have to wait until her children were past their teen years to accomplish that one.

Recently the daughter and her sisters got together and made a certificate of completion in "Proverbs 31 Training." Taking every verse in the passage they came up with an example of how she had fulfilled it completely. It looked like a diploma with each member of the family signing it.

She said that she read it aloud to her mother and when she got to the last verse, "Her children called her blessed"—one by one, they all said, "Mom, you are blessed."

The mother cried and cried, never thinking that she could possibly fulfill all the descriptions of "the Proverbs 31 woman." What a wonderful blessing was placed on her by her family.

Let me make a couple of other important observations about Jacob and his blessing his family.

Unlike Jacob, it is important to bless out families by our example.

Jacob's example for his sons was not a good one. He was willing to use dishonesty and deception to achieve his desires. He deceived his brother out of his birthright and his father out of the blessing he had for his oldest son, Esau. For Jacob the end seemed to justify the means.

One of the reasons Jacob's sons were so dysfunctional was the example they had seen lived out in their father.

Dear friends, all of us are fragile and fallen. Our families will be profoundly blessed by the example of one who is humble and willing to admit his or her failures and sins. Honest vulnerability is one of the greatest gifts we can give to our families.

But more than just the admission of wrong and the sorrow for our shortcomings, we must be willing to repent, turn around and leave our sinful life behind. Do you see the blessing we can bring to our families?

By God's grace, they see us restored to faithfulness and given a second chance. The young and old alike need to believe that God is a God of second chances. They can see that crucial truth lived out in the very fabric of your life. What a blessing that can bring!

What kind of blessing are you imparting to your family by your example?

Listen to this example set by a child as told by Bill White:

"It was one of those evenings when everything goes wrong. The kids were cranky while I was making dinner, so I got them some hot chocolate to tide them over. Timothy, who is five, decided to throw his marshmallows at his little sister, knocking her hot chocolate all over her. As she began screaming, the phone rang (and I foolishly answered it) and the doorbell rang (and I foolishly answered it—with the phone on one ear and a screaming kid in the background). I then returned to the kitchen and hollered at Timothy, and promptly had two crying kids.

As dinner began to burn and I deposited my daughter in the bath, I loudly announced that I was so angry I might do anything, so I declared that I was putting myself in timeout. I closed the door, none too gently, and tried to get dinner to be the only thing simmering in the kitchen.

Everything changed about ten minutes later when I caught sight of a yellow piece of construction paper sliding under the door. In the unsteady hand of a kindergartener was scrawled a message of grace that pierced my heart and turned me around:

'From Timothy. To Dad. I still love you even when you're angry.'" Timothy blessed his Dad by his example of gracious love.

Unlike Jacob, our blessings should be life-long and not just at death.

Again, throughout his life, Jacob jeopardized the life of his family rather than bless it. His deceptive, destructive behavior caused great pain and sorrow. While Genesis 49 is a poignant moment, for everyone's sake it's too bad there weren't moments of blessing and honest warning about the future, much earlier.

From the cradle to the grave, we must look for ways to bless those we love. It should happen in families as a normal, natural part of their routine. We never outgrow our need to be

affirmed and given hope for the future no matter how uncertain that may be. In God's scheme of things, the family is the place where blessings first, most often, and best are given to one another.

The first blessing an infant should receive is that of having parents who really love each other. That can't be over emphasized.

Listen to these words which I read this week about Bob Carlisle the singer who sang the enormously popular song, "Butterfly Kisses" in 1996. The song speaks of the relationship of love and blessing between a father and a daughter.

Reflecting upon the song's phenomenal success, Bob Carlisle said, "I get a lot of mail from young girls who try to get me to marry their moms. That used to be a real chuckle because it's so cute, but when I realized they don't want a romance for mom; they want the father who is in the song, and that just kills me."

The church, the family of faith, should also be the place where blessings are bestowed upon people of all ages. We should be blessed and enriched by those with whom we share our lives in the Body of Christ.

In the often harsh, hard world we live in, we desperately need to be imparting honest blessing on people. Blessings should take place in our schools, in our workplaces, wherever we live to share life with others. I am conscious of this when I frequent the same restaurants with the people who serve me.

If each of us caught a vision of what we could do by bringing blessing into the lives of other people, think of the changes we could be used to impart; think of how much more receptive the watching world would become to following our Lord Jesus.

Application

In the Old Testament, God is referred to as the "God of Jacob." At first blush, that seems like a lousy name when we think of the kind of scoundrel Jacob really was. But maybe there is a redemptive quality to the name. If God is willing to be called the "God of Jacob" He can also be called by your name and mine. There is hope.

Likewise, if you haven't done a very good job of blessing your family, there is hope. By God's grace and help, you can change. That change can start today. God is a God of second chances.

In these moments of stillness and quiet, are there blessings you need to give to your family? Right now, ask God how you can bring blessing to those you love the most; those who are nearest and dearest to you. Are there apologies that need to be made? Are there words of affirmation that need to be lovingly shared? Do members of your family need to hear honest words of hope from you?

God's basic unit in life is the family. How might God want to use you to share His blessing in your family?