

Blessings for God's Family

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[0 : 00] Well, it'd be great if you could grab your Bibles and turn again to our first reading to Genesis chapter 49 as we look at the second last chapter of our series.

I love living in Melbourne, except at the moment. This past week, it feels like we just live in the wrong state, doesn't it?

It's been dark and wet, with most days being a top of 13 degrees. In fact, at the moment, it's just ticked over to three degrees.

Meanwhile, in Brisbane, where my brother lives, they've had sunny 21 degree days, and I think it's 18 up there currently. And what's more, Brisbane last Thursday recorded eight consecutive days of COVID-free cases, while we, last Thursday, were the only state to record eight consecutive days of double-digit cases.

And now we're up to 11 days, and just yesterday, there was 41 new cases. And so it feels like we're the unclean state of Australia, like we've got leprosy or something.

[1 : 14] Because the New South Wales Premier, you may have heard, said last week on your screens that she called on all tourism vendors to bar any travellers from Melbourne.

And down the bottom, I called on all organisations not to interact with citizens from Melbourne. Can you feel the love? Despite the fact that only a few weeks ago, she was the one complaining that the other states had closed their borders to them.

Now, on a serious note, we do need to stop the spread. But the point is, when it comes to the states of Australia at the moment, there seems to be mixed blessings.

And our state seems to have the bad blessings. Well, as we come to Genesis 49 today, we come to the mixed blessings, not of the states of Australia, but the sons of Jacob.

Remember, Jacob is dying. And last week, we saw adoption into God's family, where he adopted his grandsons. Well, this week, we see the blessings for God's family, where he blesses his own sons, which shape their futures.

[2 : 24] I have a look at the context in verses 1 and 2. Here we read, Then Jacob called for his sons and said, Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come.

Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob. Listen to your father, Israel. Notice here that Jacob is telling them about their future. As was custom, all the male heirs would come to their father's deathbed to receive the final blessings.

It was like the reading of the last will and testament. But these patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were also like Old Testament prophets.

The blessings they gave were the ones God fulfilled. And sometimes, though, in unexpected ways. And so the blessings Jacob gave would shape his son's futures, shape what sort of tribe they'd become.

This is how the passage ends also in verse 28, when it talks about blessings. Just turn to the end of the passage in verse 28. Now, we didn't read this before, but verse 28, all these are the 12 tribes of Israel.

[3 : 38] And this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him. When it says giving each the blessing appropriate to him, it doesn't mean appropriate to what the sons did, although that is still true for some of them.

It means appropriate to what the sons will become, which is true for all of them. You see, these blessings would shape their future, but they are mixed, like the states of Australia.

For starters, there are some bad blessings, like Victoria. So we're at point one, which will be most of the sermon. Have a look in your Bibles at verses three and four.

Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honour, excelling in power, turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel.

For you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it. Reuben is Jacob's firstborn, which came with a position of power and honour.

[4 : 47] But back in chapter 35, he slept with Bilhah, one of his father's wives and the mother of two of his own brothers. I mean, this is not just sinful, it's gross.

And so he will no longer excel. In fact, he loses his firstborn position to the sons of Joseph. Remember last week, Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, on the slide on your screen, we're at 10 and 11 position because Joseph was born 11th.

But then on the next slide, they went up to share first position, first and second with Reuben and Simeon. But this week, Reuben's lost his position. And so now on the next slide, it's just Joseph's sons who are sharing the top position.

You see, sin has consequences, doesn't it? And he, not just for Reuben, but for the tribe that comes from him. For this bad blessing or punishment shaped the future of his tribe, didn't it?

And so the Reubenites were no longer regarded as the firstborn tribe and they did not excel. And no prophet, judge or king ever came from this tribe.

[6 : 02] And as one commentator put it, the Reubenites seem to fade out of national history. And so Reuben is not really the tribe you want to belong to, is it?

And their future is not so great. But what about Simeon and Levi, verses five to seven? He says, Simeon and Levi are brothers. Their swords are weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council.

Let me not join their assembly. For they have killed men in their anger and hamstring oxen as they pleased. Cursed be their anger so fierce and their fury so cruel.

I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel. That's not so good here either, is it? This incident refers back to chapter 34, where their sister Dinah was taken by a man called Shechem.

Simeon and Levi didn't just seek justice for their sister, which would have been understandable. They went much further and took revenge. For they killed every man in the city and looted it.

[7 : 11] The reference to hamstringing oxen is a cruel practice where you cut the tendons of the legs so they can't walk properly, often starve to death because they can't get to water and food.

And chapter 34 doesn't tell us they did this. They may have. Or it may be just a poetic way of speaking about their cruelty in general. As verse 7 says, their fury so cruel.

Either way, they went far beyond justice, didn't they? And so verse 7, their tribes will end up dispersed amongst the nation of Israel. And it was fulfilled.

Simeon got a spot of land on the next slide on your screens down the bottom there. But it was in the middle of Judah. And so what happened was, over time, they were absorbed by Judah and dispersed amongst Judah.

And some of them went up north as well. So they were dispersed throughout Israel. And this is a reminder here that sin has consequences.

[8 : 14] Not just for us, but for others too. If we believe in Jesus, we can be forgiven by God, which is fantastic and never gets old, does it?

But sometimes our sin can still have a ripple effect to others, can't it? I just think of a marriage affair. How many people does that sin impact? Our friends who have to force to be choose sides, family, and if there are children, they get impacted as well.

In fact, some of the times the kids are so scarred, it impacts their future marriages and so on. Now I realise with all this talk of sin, people think Christians are just party poopers who are always trying to stop people from having a good time.

But Christians are actually party promoters. Therefore, we know living God's way without sin actually promotes the best kind of life or party.

You know, one with no hangovers, so to speak. What's more, we also know as Christians there is grace which can change our future. And so with Levi, his tribe was dispersed.

[9 : 22] God did fulfil this blessing of Jacob's. But because of grace, God did it in an unexpected way. He made them priests to be scattered amongst Israel with the privilege of teaching God's people.

people. You see, even though our sin can have ripple effects, there is always grace to forgive, to secure our eternal future and sometimes to even change our earthly future.

Or we need to keep moving from these bad blessings to some mixed blessings for some even individual tribes. We don't have time to look at them all, so skip down to verse 14.

Issachar is a raw-boned donkey lying down among the sheep pens. When he sees how good his resting place and how pleasant is his land, he will bend his shoulder to burden and submit to forced labour.

Issachar will find good pasture, it seems. A good land to lie down and enjoy. And that's where the tribe ended up on the slide. The next one. In yellow, it's a bit hard to see but hopefully you can see it on your screens.

[10 : 35] It borders the Jordan River a little bit and it's just southwest of the Sea of Galilee. But it seems they will give up some of their freedom and submit to forced labour, which is probably why they're likened to a jaw-boned or a strong donkey.

And so this is a mixed blessing, isn't it? So also Dan in verse 16. Dan will provide justice for his people as one of the tribes of nations.

That's positive but verse 17, Dan will be a snake by the roadside, a viper along the path that bites the horse's heels so that its rider tumbles backwards.

Dan, as his name suggests, will bring justice or vindication like he brought to vindication to Rachel when he was born. Born through Bilhah, Rachel's servant.

And we see this in the book of Judges because Samson, you know, the great judge of Israel was from this tribe and he brought vindication to Israel when he defeated the Philistines.

[11 : 44] And yet, verse 17, Dan is also described as a snake or literally a serpent. And the last serpent we met in Genesis tempted Adam and Eve to sin, didn't he?

And what's more, later on in Judges 18, the tribe of Dan acts incredibly sinfully. In fact, it's interesting that in Revelation, Dan is the only tribe not mentioned.

Here is another mixed blessing. Agad and Benjamin also have mixed blessings and if we're honest, so do we in this life, don't we? I mean, life does not always go smoothly for us, does it?

That might be the understatement of this particular year. We experience both ups and downs. If only we could have all the good blessings without the bad.

And that's what the rest of Jacob's sons seem to have. Have a look at verse 20. Asher's food will be rich. He will provide delicacies fit for a king.

[12 : 48] Here are good blessings only. Asher will live the good life with fine food. They are the master chef tribe of Israel. And so it's not a bad tribe to belong to, is it?

In verse 25, sorry, verse 21, Naphtali, it's hard to understand, but it looks positive. Although both these tribes' good blessings are dwarfed by Joseph's.

Have a look at verse 22. Just skip down to verse 22. Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring whose branches climb over a wall.

With bitterness archers attacked him. They shot at him with hostility, but his bow remained steady. His strong arms stayed limber because of the hand of the mighty one of Jacob, because of the shepherd, the rock of Israel, because of your father's God who helps you, because of the almighty who blesses you with blessings of the skies above, blessings of the deep springs below, blessings of the breast and womb.

Here, Jacob starts by recounting Joseph's life, where he is now, which is very fruitful in the land of Egypt, but how his brothers attacked him like archers with bows.

[14 : 10] But he also recounts how God was with him and blessed him. Back in chapter 39, we were told four times that the Lord was with him, and here we're told four times that because of this, the Lord has blessed him.

God's presence with Joseph meant God's blessing for Joseph, which is true for us too, though as we'll see our blessings are different from Joseph's. But after recounting Joseph's past, Jacob now predicts his future.

Verse 26, your father's blessings are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains, than the bounty of the age-old hills. Let all these rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the prince among his brothers.

Jacob's blessing for Joseph means he will inherit the majority of Jacob's blessings, and since he is the prince amongst his brothers, that is, he's now got the firstborn position.

Reuben's lost it, his sons Ephraim and Manasseh have it. And that's what happened. Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, on your screens there, in purple and green, together inherit more land than all the other tribes.

[15 : 26] And now we saw last week that Ephraim in green would actually be bigger than Manasseh in purple, and doesn't look like that at the moment, does it? Yet remember Ephraim kept his firstborn status, such that the whole northern kingdom, that's pretty much everything above Judah, on your screens there, was also called Ephraim.

So that's quite a lot more, isn't it? And so it is fulfilled, but in an unexpected way. But the point is, these are good blessings, and yet as good as they are, Judah gives Joseph a run for his money.

So come with me back to verse 8. Have a look at verse 8. Judah, your brothers will praise you, your hand will be on the neck of your enemies, your father's sons will bow down to you.

Now here, Judah's name means praise, but it's his brothers who will end up praising and bowing to him as their king. You see, while the status of the firstborn went to Joseph, he is the prince among the brothers, brothers, it's actually from Judah that the king of Israel will come.

And he will rule as king over his brothers. See verse 9 and 10. You, Judah, are a lion's cub. You return from the prey, my son. Like a lion, he crouches and lies down.

[16 : 51] Like a lioness, who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until it to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.

In verse 9, it's a picture of a lion's power, such that no one dares challenge him. In other words, the lion is the king of the jungle. Well, so too the tribe of Judah will produce the king of Israel.

In fact, in verse 10, the true king will always come from Judah. For it says, the scepter will not depart, nor the ruler's staff, until it comes to the one from Judah who will rule the nations.

And look at the kingdom and king. This one will be, verse 11. This one to whom it comes will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch.

He will wash his garments in wine, his robe in the blood of grapes. His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk.

[18 : 04] Here the king will be handsome, dark eyes, white teeth, no Colgate whitening toothpaste needed. And his kingdom will have an abundance of blessings. Now, whatever you think about wine, the Bible uses great vines and wine as symbols of great prosperity and blessing.

They were for the upper class. And here the king can tie his donkey to the best branches and not care if the donkey eats the grapes of the current vintage because there'll be so many other choice branches to choose from.

And there'll be so much wine that you can wash your clothes in the Penfolds Grange Hermitage and not care. The average load of washing uses between 50 and 150 litres of water, depending if it's a front loader or top loader, that's between 60 and 200 bottles of wine.

Can you imagine having that much wine lying around, as common as water? Now, of course, wine stains your clothes, so you'd never do that, but you get the point. This king's kingdom will have buckets of blessings beyond our imagining.

Now, Judah didn't deserve such blessing. I mean, he did repent of his sin with Tamar and he acted more responsibly than Reuben. We've seen that. But to become the tribe of kings whose kingdom would bear such abundant blessings, well, that's more than he deserves.

[19 : 40] His grace again. But either way, with a future like this, then surely this is the tribe you'd want to belong to, isn't it? Better than a sunny and COVID-free Queensland, absolutely.

And God fulfilled this blessing too, although partially. You see, from Judah came King David and King Solomon whose kingdom did see abundant blessing.

And so on the next slide, we're told that under King Solomon, silver was as common as stones. Can you imagine that? So instead of kicking your foot on a stone, you'd kick it on a block of silver or something.

And the nations did come and pay homage to Solomon like the Queen of Sheba did. And yet, while God fulfilled these blessings, it wasn't quite what we saw in Judah, where there were bucket loads of blessings, wine everywhere, and so on.

And not all the nations obeyed Solomon despite paying homage to him. What's more, none of these blessings for any of the sons lasted.

[20 : 48] for every tribe, including Judah, eventually suffered the curse of judgment for sin. Despite 200 years worth of warnings, they persisted in sin and so were exiled.

Which brings us to point two, more briefly. You see, almost in the middle of our passage, there is this prayer of Jacob that stands out.

It's verse 18. It's a different verse to all the other verses and it addresses God directly, not his sons. Jacob cries out to God saying in verse 18, I look for your deliverance, Lord.

Perhaps as he was blessing his sons and realizing how mixed the blessings were, he thought, crikey, please God, deliver them. Or perhaps he knew of their sin and the curse of judgment, that was bound to follow.

And what's more, ever since Genesis chapter 3, on the next slide, we've been looking for this offspring or descendant of Eve, who would deliver people from the curse of sin and crush the serpent's head.

[22 : 05] And now we're also looking for a king from Judah, the one who will have this abundant kingdom. for Jacob's blessings said there would always be a king from this tribe who would bring the bucket load blessings.

And if God fulfilled the other blessings, then what about this part of Judah's blessing? Well, as you know, God did fulfill it in Christ. Point three. Our second reading from Revelation was written by the apostle John.

And do you remember what one of the elders told John? He said on the next slide there, He said, see the lion of the tribe of Judah. The root of David has triumphed.

This is Jesus. Yet while John looks, he also sees on your screens there, not a lion, but a lamb looking as though it had been slain.

The lion of a lamb was the king who died for us to make us a new tribe. And that's what the elders sang on the next slide.

[23 : 14] The lion of Judah is the lamb whose blood was the price he paid to purchase us from the curse of judgment for our sin. Here is the offspring of Eve who delivers us from the curse and triumphs over Satan.

Here is grace that changes our eternal future. But notice on your screens he purchased a people for God. We don't join Judah or Levi.

We join the new tribe of Christ. Made up of people from every other tribe and nation that we might serve God as priests.

Obey Christ our king. Here is Jacob's blessing fully fulfilled. Here is the seed of Eve who delivers from the curse.

And it's this new Christ tribe that is truly blessed abundantly. For our future will not be a portion of the land like it was for Judah or any other tribe but it will be the whole earth.

[24 : 26] For as we saw last week from Romans 8 we are co-heirs with Christ. Whatever Christ inherits we inherit. it. Whether it be a perfect resurrection body like his or ruling over the whole earth with him.

This earth will have that new car smell if you like. It will be a new heavens and a new earth as we read on the next slide from Revelation 21.

Where there will be no more crying or death or pain. What's more evil? It will be a city of God will be there and it won't just have silver but gold as common as stone streets of gold.

And it will shine with God's glory such that it won't even need the sun. Never dark and miserable never three degrees in the morning. And finally on the next slide there will no longer be any curse.

No more bad blessings no more mixed ones only good ones including seeing our Christian loved ones.

[25 : 39] Can you imagine all this? It's actually beyond our imagining I think. It's that good. These are the promised blessings we have in Christ that will shape our future or that they do shape our future.

This is what we've got to look forward to. Here is your hermitage grange or whatever is the equivalent for you. Here is every physical blessing. Here is sharing everything of Christ.

You see this line of a lamb gave his all that we might share in all his blessings. And we know it will be fulfilled.

For if God fulfilled Jacob's blessings how much more so Christ. In fact we've already begun to enjoy some of those blessings because in the Christ tribe we saw last week on your screens we have already been given every spiritual blessing.

That's not a bucket load of blessing that's every single spiritual blessing. All of them. Like adoption as we saw last week such that God is our father who's always with us like he was always with Joseph and to bless us spiritually now and to bring us into every physical blessing later.

[27 : 01] In other words in the tribe of Christ we have every spiritual blessing now and every physical blessing in our future in our days to come guaranteed. And so for us can I ask you this morning are you in the state or the tribe that's truly blessed?

That is are you a Christian? If you're not or not sure then please email us we'd love to talk but for us who are then do you realize how truly blessed our state our Christ tribe is?

What will happen to us in days to come? I don't know how life is going for you at the moment perhaps it feels like your life is full of bad blessings like the state of Victoria or the tribe of Reuben or perhaps it feels like your life is full of mixed blessings like the states across Australia or all the sons of Jacob my family was supposed to fly out to see Michelle's brother in Sweden this morning today and now we're not even welcome to see our family and friends in New South Wales because the New South Wales Premier also said welcome your friends who may be intending to visit you from Victoria it's not the hot spots anymore it's the whole state the love you can feel it can't you and all this because of the sin of others who didn't keep their distance and has now had ripple effects to us of course

I know many others face much worse as some I know face a mixed bag of blessings when it comes to their health it's like one step forward two steps back for others it's a mixed bag of blessings with work you've got job keeper now but it doesn't quite cover the bills and it won't last forever for others it's a mixed bag when it comes to Christian loved ones you know where they are going or where they have gone now that they've passed but you still miss them and it sometimes still hurts well no matter what state we live in no matter what mixed blessings we experience fix your eyes on Jesus in whom we have an abundant blessings that are more than make up for the mixed ones now last week I mentioned the person in my Bible study group whose prayer point was that they might fix their eyes on Jesus rather than their circumstances that's still a good prayer point isn't it and in a sense it's the same this week only this week we've seen even more the blessings we have in

Christ not just adoption like it was last week but every spiritual blessing with the guarantee of every physical one to come a future which where there'll be no more curse and will reign forever with Christ and that will more than make up for our mixed blessings in this life won't it if the airlines put up the price of the tickets or if my family never gets to Sweden well we can go in the new creation for free that'll more than make up for it and if we cannot see our friends in New South Wales well we'll have an eternity with them actually if they're watching this this morning I'm not sure they'll count that as a blessing but you get the point don't you no matter what state we live in no matter what mixed blessings we experience fix your eyes on Christ in whom we have abundant blessings that will more than make up for the mixed ones in this life and secondly we're to faithfully serve

[30 : 48] Christ as our king the lion of Judah whether it's by loving others in the shopping center which can be hard to do can't it especially now that there's no toilet paper again can you believe it or maybe it's just the one Coles I went to but do we love those who push past us or in front of us like our king wants us to or whether it's serving our king by serving his church I'm so thankful we've been able to do online services but one of the dangers is that it breeds consumer Christians you know where you just watch the screen and consume without serving one another but serving our king means joyfully serving his people and so will you come back with bells on where we can serve one another or will you resist or only reluctantly return or whether it's serving our king by the way we drive

I can't remember if I've told you this but I remember driving down Mitcham road not far from here and I had this song stuck in my head from the Wednesday at two service and that song that says you know Jesus is Lord Jesus I'm not going to sing it for you although you can turn down the volume I suppose but I was singing this song and this person cut me off and you know how I responded not with bless you must be in a rush I responded with Jesus is Lord I realized the hypocrisy of what I just did and that's why God's forgiveness never gets old by the way but the point is do we keep serving Jesus as our king no matter what state we live in or what mixed blessings we experience remember the abundant blessings we have in Christ and faithfully serve him for this lion of a lamb gave his all that we might share in his all his blessings how can we not therefore keep serving him with our all let's pray father we join with those in heaven who say worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise father thank you for the lord Jesus the king the lion of Judah who became our sacrificial lamb dying to pay for our sins that we might share in his blessings help us to fix our eyes on him and the abundant blessings we have and help us to faithfully serve him with our life our soul our all we ask it in Jesus name amen guys all you the words and