

Adoption into God's Family

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, and can I add my welcome to Vijay's. It's great you could tune in this morning to our online service. Michelle, our children's minister, did such a good job of explaining the guts of the passage.

I think we'll just skip the sermon and sing. So let's almost had you. You got really excited, didn't you? You're not that lucky. But great minds think alike.

And my intro today is about something better than a dog. It's about the adoption of another family member in the Price family. You might remember last year on your screens, we adopted Ruby the rabbit.

Well, according to my daughter, Ruby has been lonely. So on the next slide, meet Peroni, or as he's often called, Pepperoni. He's a bit camera shy. He's hiding under the box there.

Now, before we could adopt him into our family, the RSPCA said we had to bring Ruby down to meet him and see if they got along first.

[1 : 02] And having been worn down by one of my daughters about getting another rabbit, I promised if the rabbits got along, I would think about adopting him.

But they came home with him anyway. Apparently, my daughter had faith in my promise so much so that she just decided to adopt him straight away.

Well, today in Genesis 48, we see a different sort of adoption, but based on faith in God's promises. In fact, faith in God's promises is the underlying theme that runs through these last chapters of Genesis, especially as Jacob approaches his death, as we see in the last three chapters.

So today, Jacob's faith in God's promises means he'll adopt his grandsons to become his sons. This apparently was a common custom in the ancient world, even though it might sound weird to us.

But hey, adopting a rabbit instead of eating it would sound weird to them. So we're even. But this adoption begins with Jacob's faith in the face of death.

[2 : 19] So point one on your screens and verse one in your Bibles. Sometime later, Joseph was told, your father is ill. So he took his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, although I just say Ephraim, along with him.

When Jacob was told, your son Joseph has come to you, Israel rallied his strength and set up in the bed. Now notice here in verse two, Jacob is called Israel because that was one of the names or the new name God gave him, which became the name for the nation.

Because the nation of Israel was made up of 12 tribes, which came from Jacob's 12 sons. And so Jacob or Israel, well, the nation got his name.

But here Israel is ill. In fact, he's dying. So Joseph is called to see his dad and his dad again remembers God's promises. So verse three, Jacob said to Joseph, God almighty appeared to me at Luz or Bethel in the land of Canaan.

And there he blessed me and said to me, I'm going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples. And I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.

[3 : 39] You see how Jacob recalls how he met God at Bethel, where he wrestled with God, if you remember. And afterwards, God blessed him and promised him both land and offspring.

I remember on the next slide, the job promises that God gave Abraham. We started to see them last week. Well, here they are again this week. And like last week, we again see Jacob's faith in these promises, for he believes God will bless his family with many offspring or people and the land so much so that he wants Joseph's two sons to have an equal share in these blessings.

In other words, he shows his faith in God's promises by adopting his grandsons as co-heirs with their uncles to be blessed along with them.

And we know this is an act of faith because the New Testament on the next slide on your screen tells us it was by faith that Jacob did this. Now, it's worth pausing at this point to remember Jacob is not yet in the land of Canaan, the promised land.

Nor has he seen his family become a great nation. What's more, he's about to die so he won't see those things. And yet in the face of his death, he still has faith in God's promises, doesn't he?

[5 : 10] So the question is, do we? We may not be facing death, though I know, sadly, some who are. But we do all face obstacles or hardship in life, don't we?

We may not be facing death, which can tempt us to doubt God's promises. For example, God promises to work for our good, but it's hard to believe it and even see it when we are suffering or our loved ones are suffering, isn't it?

Or God promises to provide for our needs, yet it is sometimes hard to believe it when the provision takes so long to arrive.

Or God promises to answer our prayers, but it's sometimes hard to believe it when we don't see the answer we want. When it's hard to see the fulfillment of God's promises, will we, like Jacob, still have faith?

Well, we come back to this idea of faith in God's promises, particularly in the last chapter in two weeks' time. For now, let's look at how and why Jacob adopts these two grandsons.

[6 : 18] So we're at point two on your screens, and then verse five in your Bibles. Now then, says Jacob, your two sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine.

Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine. Any children born to you after them will be yours, and the territory they inherit, they will be reckoned under the name of their brothers, Manasseh and Ephraim.

As I was returning from Paddan to my sorrow, Rachel died in the land of Canaan, while we were still on the way, a little distance from Ephra. So I buried her there beside the road to Ephra, that is Bethlehem.

And notice in verse five here, when Jacob says he reckons them as his, that's him saying he's about to adopt them as his sons.

Now, he's not taking them away from Joseph. Rather, he's giving them the inheritance of Joseph as Joseph's representatives. And far from Joseph feeling gypped about this, he would have been happy because this is a greater blessing that he could have hoped for for his sons.

[7 : 34] Because they have jumped up the pecking order, you see, from being two of many grandsons to being numbered among Jacob's own 12 sons.

And so the sons on the next slide on your screen look like this. Joseph was born in the 11th place. But then on the next slide, Manasseh and Ephraim took his spot.

And so it effectively went to 13 tribes, if you like. But then later on, on the next slide, in Exodus, the tribe of Levi became the priests.

And they didn't get any allotment of land. So it kind of went back to 12. This is why there is no tribe of Joseph. We don't hear about it.

But we do hear about the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim in Israel. But why these two? After all, chapter 46 lists a whole stack of other grandsons that Jacob could have adopted.

[8 : 36] So why these two? Well, verse 5 gives us a clue. It was only these two, we're told, who were born in Egypt before Jacob arrived.

In other words, only these two grew up surrounded by Egyptian culture. And they had no community of God's people to belong to until Jacob's big family, you know, or 70 of them arrived. And so adopting them was Jacob's way of formally taking them from Egypt into his family, God's chosen family.

Ensuring the boys knew this is who they were and where they belonged. Not to Egypt, but to Israel. Part of God's chosen people to share in God's promised blessings.

And so Jacob's a bit like Megan, my daughter, who believed my promise about adopting Peroni, the rabbit, so much so, they came home with him anyway.

[9 : 40] But what's more, when Megan brought Peroni home, she gave him an equal share with Ruby, her firstborn rabbit, so to speak. Which, let me tell you, Ruby did not like so much.

There was biting and missing fur. And here in verse 5, did you notice, that's what Jacob also does. He doesn't just adopt the boys, he also elevates them to an equal share with his firstborn. Not Ruby, but Reuben and Simeon. You see, Joseph was born 11th in line, as we said, he was the second youngest. But instead of just adopting them and putting them in that position, Jacob also elevates them to be equal with his firstborn sons.

And so on the next slide, they start off here in position 10 and 11. That's where Joseph was. But then on the next slide, they end up moving right up the top. And in fact, next week, Reuben and Simeon forfeit their firstborn spot.

And so Ephraim and Manasseh get it to themselves. Why does Jacob not only adopt them, but also elevate them? Well, this time, I don't think it's an act of faith, like the adoption was, but an act of favoritism.

[10:57] For these boys were the eldest sons of his favorite son, Joseph. And the eldest grandsons of his favorite wife, Rachel. I mean, did you notice in verse 7 how Jacob recalls Rachel's death?

Clearly, he still feels her loss. Now, it's normal to miss a loved one. I'd worry if we didn't. But his other wife, Leah, has also died.

And yet on your screens on Genesis 49, notice how he just lists Leah along with the others. I buried Leah. There's no sorrow mentioned.

And so I suspect there's still favoritism in Jacob's heart. And while the writer of Genesis never overtly condemns favoritism, he does so, I think, subtly.

By showing all the problems it creates. Isaac's favoritism of Esau and Rebekah's favoritism of Jacob, it tore the family apart, didn't it? Jacob's favoritism of Rachel caused strife between Rachel and Leah.

[11:57] And Jacob's favoritism of Joseph has caused envy and hatred from his brothers. And so Jacob has mixed motives here, like we can have in life, can't we?

He certainly has faith in God's promises and so adopts the boys into God's family. But he also shows favoritism by elevating them to the firstborn position. And yet God can still use mixed motives to accomplish his purposes and here to show us the way he works.

For as we'll see later, God works by adopting us into his family and elevating us to share in the blessings with his firstborn, so to speak, Christ.

And while we must believe in Jesus, too, as we heard from the kids talk, it's all by grace. And that's what we see next. So point three on your screen, verse eight in your Bibles.

When Israel saw the sons of Joseph, he asked, who are these? They are the sons God has given me here, Joseph said to his father.

[13:07] Then Israel said, bring them to me so I may bless them. Now, Israel's eyes were failing because of old age. And so he could hardly see. So Joseph brought his sons close to him and his father kissed them and embraced them.

Then Israel said to Joseph, I never expected to see your face again. And now God has allowed me to see your children, too.

He God's grace, remember, is God's undeserved generosity or gift. And here we see it in two small ways. Firstly, Joseph acknowledges that God has given him his children.

It's God's grace here. Now, as a father of three, I know sometimes hard to believe that kids are a gracious gift, but they are. I just ask those who sadly cannot have any.

And second, though, we see God's grace where Jacob acknowledges that God has allowed, verse 11, him to see not only Joseph face to face, but his grandsons as well.

[14:14] After all, Jacob did not deserve it. It's quite interesting that here he is with failing eyesight about to bless two boys. That was exactly the position his father Isaac was in when Jacob was one of the boys.

I mean, do you remember back then Jacob deceived his father? He dressed up with those hairy furs to pretend to be Esau, stealing the blessing from his older brother. But despite his deception back then and his favoritism now, God has allowed him to see these boys.

God shows grace, undeserved gift generosity, you see. But we especially see this with what happens next. Because Jacob blesses the boys, but with a twist.

Verse 12. Then Joseph removed from Israel's knees, sorry, the boys from Israel's knees and bowed down with his face to the ground.

And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel's left hand and Manasseh on his left towards Israel's right hand and brought them close to him.

[15:26] But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though it was the younger. And crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn.

I should explain here in verse 12 that the boys weren't actually sitting on Jacob's knee like kids sit on Santa's knee at the shopping centers. The boys at this stage were at least 24 years old and Jacob was dying.

They would have squashed him. Rather, I take it they stood at Jacob's knees where they bowed down so he could hug them and kiss them. And then Joseph put them back. He bowed to his dad. And then he arranged the sons, perhaps kneeling down under the appropriate hands. Manasseh the eldest under Jacob's right hand and Ephraim the youngest under the left hand.

The right hand, remember, is a sign of honor, appropriate for the firstborn. I just think Jesus, who is now seated at the right hand of the father.

[16:29] But what does Jacob do? He does a switcheroo, doesn't he? He gives the younger Ephraim the blessing traditionally reserved for the older brother Manasseh.

And so he kind of swaps his hands, doesn't he? To do the switcheroo. And he blesses the boys as Joseph's representatives. You see verse 15?

Then he blessed Joseph, that is Ephraim and Manasseh, and said, Notice, by the way, here, we have a more mature Jacob, don't we?

Last week, when Pharaoh asked him how old he was on the next slide on your screens there, notice Jacob didn't just say, Oh, I'm 130. He added, My years have been few and difficult, and a lot less than my father's.

But this week, as he blesses the boys, he recalls how God has been his shepherd, and delivered him from all harm.

[17:59] You see, he's gone from a complainer, you know those people who find something negative about everything, you know, who forget all they do have, and complain about what they don't have. He's gone from a complainer to a praiser.

As he blesses these boys, he praises God for being with him through life. As his shepherd, who walked with him through every valley of the shadow of death, he faced, as the famous Psalm 23 puts it.

And he praises God for all he's done for him, instead of complaining about what God has not given him. Complainer to praiser, you see.

Which is a good lesson for us that we'll come back to. But Joseph is not happy with this switcheroo, is he? In fact, in verse 17, the word for displeased is literally evil in his eyes.

So verse 17 says on your screens, when Joseph saw that his father placing his right hand on Ephraim's head, the younger, it was evil in his eyes.

[19:08] You see, what Jacob did was not according to the tradition of the day, nor the expectation of Joseph. So Joseph grabs his dad's hand and says, no.

He tries to soften it in verse 18 by saying, my father, but he still tells his dad what to do. Put your right hand here, you blind bat. For this was evil in Joseph's eyes.

And yet, verse 19, his father refused and said, I know, my son, I know. He too will become a great people, and he too will become great.

Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations. He blessed them that day and said, your name, in your name, the people of Israel will pronounce this blessing.

May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh. So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

Manasseh. So he, Jacob blesses both boys such that in the future, people in the nation of Israel will even invoke their names to bless others with.

[20:20] But here, the point is, Jacob also says, the younger will become greater than the older. And in fact, we know that Ephraim was the name that the northern kingdom of Israel was sometimes called by.

Well, in verses 21 to 22, it talks about the land, which we'll come back to in a couple of weeks time. But the question we still have is, why does Jacob put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh?

Why choose the younger over the older? I mean, we've seen this before in Genesis, haven't we? You know, Abel over Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, Perez over Zerah, and of course, Jacob himself over Esau.

Now, there are other reasons involved in those examples, like how Abel gave a better offering to God, or how Esau sold his birthright. But it seems Jacob has learned from his own experience, that enjoying God's blessing in God's family is an act of grace.

He may have had mixed motives for adopting and elevating the boys, but when it came to blessing them, he knew from experience, it's not about your position or tradition.

[21 : 36] He was the younger brother, remember? Nor is it about your worth or your work. He was a deceiver, remember? A heel grabber, a schemer.

Rather, he had learned that God freely chooses and blesses by grace. And so I think that's why he does it here. And so what about us?

Well, I wonder if part of us can still relate to Joseph. I think that's wrong. You know, Ephraim doesn't deserve that. It can be evil in our eyes too, can't it?

But here's the thing. Neither boy deserved to be adopted nor elevated as Jacob's firstborn sons. To start with, it itself was an act of grace.

And grace by nature is an undeserved gift. And so it cannot be demanded or determined how to be given. It's up to the giver.

[22 : 35] Otherwise, grace stops being a gift and starts being an obligation. Rather, because grace is underserved, it can be given by the giver to whomever they choose.

And this is how God works for us. God adopts us out of the world to belong to his family and share in his blessings. And not because of our position or our Christian family's tradition.

Not because of our worth in the world or good works we have done. No, rather he adopts us as his sons to share in his promises by grace.

This is what we heard on the next slide from our second reading. And notice there on your screen in verse three, Paul begins by praising God.

Why? Because we have been blessed in Christ. How? Well, verse four, for God chose us and verse five adopted us when we didn't deserve it.

[23 : 39] You know, while we were sinners. And let me tell you, it costs God a whole lot more than it costs us to adopt Peroni. Or it costs Jacob to adopt his grandsons.

It costs God the blood of his only son to adopt us. And that's why it says on your screen in verse five, it was adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ.

I noticed there at the start of verse five, God didn't do this out of faith or favoritism, but out of love for you and me. And verse six, it was because of his glorious grace that we might praise him for that grace.

How great is God's adoption of us? And in case that's not enough, he also elevates us, doesn't he? To share in the blessings of his firstborn son, as Jesus is called elsewhere.

And that's why on your screen in verse five, it's adoption to sonship. It's not about gender. It's about being an heir who inherits things.

[24 : 54] In fact, that's what when Jesus is called the firstborn refers to. It's not being born first. Jesus as God, the son always existed. It's about being an heir.

And God has adopted us and elevated us as co-heirs with Christ, as Paul puts it in Romans on your screens. Now we'll look more at the abundant blessings we have as co-heirs with Christ next week. But for this week, the question is, do we then along with Paul, praise God for his grace? Or do we, along with Joseph, think it's evil in our eyes?

Are we praisers or complainers? Well, I suspect when it comes to ourselves being adopted by grace, it's not evil at all, is it?

You know, we're quite happy for God to adopt us and elevate us to sharing Christ's blessings. But what about when we see God doing it for others who really don't deserve it?

[25 : 59] Or perhaps more likely, when God doesn't do it for those we think do deserve it. Perhaps our loved ones. I know a guy who has four adult kids, but only three of them are Christians.

He's thankful for the three who are adopted by God and sharing Christ's blessings. But for a long time, he was frustrated with God that the fourth wasn't. I mean, he prayed and prayed for a long time and nothing.

He even got to the point where he said, it's not fair, God. And although he didn't use the words, it was evil. In his eyes. Until he understood afresh the nature of grace.

That none of us deserve it. Not the three kids, nor himself for that matter. And so while his fourth son is still not yet a Christian, yet, he can still praise God for his own adoption and of the other three.

He can still praise God without being bitter and complaining about the one who is not yet saved. Now, don't get me wrong. He still prays and begs God to have mercy on this fourth son.

[27 : 16] And so should we. In fact, we'll do that in a little while. But this man no longer thinks it's evil in his eyes. Like Jacob, he remembers all God has done for him.

And so he can still be a praiser rather than a complainer. Of course, in our chapter today, both Ephraim and Manasseh are adopted into God's family, aren't they?

It's just that the wrong one was more blessed than the other, which was evil in Joseph's eyes. So perhaps for us, when we look at fellow Christians, it can feel like that too.

That God's blessed the wrong one, which really means anyone other than me, doesn't it? And so we can ask, can't we? Why does God allow me to suffer more than those other Christians in God's family?

Or how can, how come God answers their prayers the way they wanted, but not mine? Or why does God bless their life and make it so much easier than my life?

[28 : 21] Or how come our state premier has increased the restrictions, while other states have decreased the restrictions? It can seem evil in our eyes, can't it? Now, God does give us some reasons for why he does what he does in the Bible, like working for our good and that he sees the bigger picture.

But another reason is, none of us deserve any gift, in the first place. Grace, by its nature, is given freely by the giver.

So we cannot demand God give us the same blessings in this life, as our fellow Christian beside us. Otherwise, it's no longer grace.

What's more, like Jacob, we're to remember and praise God for all the blessings he has given us in Christ, rather than complaining about the ones he hasn't given us in this life.

We're to be praisers, not complainers. One of the people in my Wednesday night Bible study group faces various struggles in her life, but her prayer point last week was this. She said, pray that I'll fix my eyes on Jesus and not my circumstances.

[29 : 34] That's pretty good prayer, isn't it? In other words, help me remember all God has given me in Christ, rather what he hasn't given me in life. For she, like Jacob, wants to be a praiser, not a complainer.

Of course, what will help us to be praisers, is to see just how abundant our blessings in Christ really are, which is what we'll look at next week.

So come back. But until then, let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for the reminder today of our adoption by grace to share in the blessings of Christ.

And so we say, along with Paul, praise be to you, the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Help us, we ask, to keep being praisers rather than complainers.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.