

**THE FINAL MINISTRY OF PARENTS
GENESIS 47-49**

NEED: TO DO OUR FINAL MINISTRY WELL.

PROPOSITION: JACOB PROVIDES AGING PARENTS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF HOW TO RELATE TO YOUR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN.

OBJECTIVE: TO PREPARE AGING PARENTS FOR THEIR FINAL MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION:

The last of life should be the best. The last acts of ministry on the part of a parent should be most enjoyable. This was obviously true in the life of God's notable servant, Jacob.

The book of Genesis gives us almost three complete chapters that cover the last period of Jacob's life. As we watch this aged man who finds himself spending his last days in a strange environment still relating to his sons and his grandsons, we see an example of how life should be lived and ministry should be done. Since some of us are in or near that stage of life, we can learn from the example of Jacob. Since some of us have parents or grandparents are in that stage of life, we can learn from Joseph and his brothers about relating to elderly parents and grandparents. This is a very inspiring section of Scripture for the careful reader. It leaves you with a profound sense of gratitude for family and what we receive through our families.

Just because you have become elderly, it does not mean that your ministry is completed. As long as you still have your mental faculties and breath, there is a ministry for you. Your final ministry may be your most influential ministry. Let us learn from Jacob how to do it.

I. PARENTS HAVE BLESSINGS TO BESTOW.

The verb that keeps reoccurring in this section of Scripture is the word "bless." Wherever Jacob seems to always have been "blessing" someone. This is a word that is used often in the Old Testament and indicates a significant ministerial activity of Jacob. He was passing on to others something of significance. Interestingly this is especially a God-like activity since this verb is most often used of God.

1. A prayer for divine favor.

In some settings to bless is really to express a prayer for God's favor upon the person. This is probably the way we're to see what Jacob did to Pharaoh. It is an indication of how Jacob saw himself when he came into the presence of the ruler of Egypt. He was brought into the presence of the Pharaoh by Joseph and presented before the Pharaoh with a lot of respect on the part of Joseph. Moses reports that when Jacob came into the presence of the pharaoh that "Jacob blessed Pharaoh." It was so significant that when the interview with Pharaoh was completed Moses reports, "then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from his presence." Even though he was in the presence of such a mighty ruler of the land Jacob approached him as one who had something to give. He was not in the presence of the Pharaoh as a beggar but as a minister. We probably should understand

that Jacob offered a prayer to the God of his fathers on the behalf of Pharaoh. It may have sounded something like this: "May the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel grant to you long life and fill your life with His peace always!" Jacob had lived long enough to know that the favor of God makes the difference in life and he desired the favor of God upon the life of this generous ruler who was providing a home for him and his sons.

Jacob later does a similar thing with the two sons of Joseph - Manasseh and Ephraim. he bestows upon them a special blessings and it probably included the idea of a prayer for divine favor upon these two grandsons.

I have shared with you earlier about an experience in our family a couple of years ago. It was one of the rare occasions in recent years where my family had been able to gather in something of a family reunion. Most of the children and grandchildren were there. One of the things we did while we were together with my dad and my mother, realizing it would probably be our last time to be together with dad, we asked him to pronounce a blessing upon his children and his grandchildren. And he did. In his own humble way he prayed by name for each of his children and each of his grandchildren and asked God's favor and God's blessings upon us. Each of us went away from that quiet time of prayer with special gratitude in our hearts. We had received a blessing from our father.

I could wish for you that you'd have the special joy of bestowing such blessing upon your children and grandchildren as your final ministry.

2. A transfer of responsibility.

There is a real significance as it relates to the plan of God in these events recorded in these chapters. Up to this point God purpose has resided in an individual--Abraham, Isaac, and then Jacob. But from this point on the promise of God will not reside in an individual but will reside in a family and then in a nation. When Jacob blessed his two grandsons he adopted them. They took a place in his family as sons, not grandsons. He told Joseph that from this day forward they would be his sons.

As you read the unfolding history in the future it is obvious that this is what happened.

Ephraim and Manasseh, not the tribe of Joseph are the distinct tribes of the sons of Israel. In the extended chapter in which Jacob as his last act spoke a word of blessing over his sons, he transferred to those sons the divine blessing that had been upon him. What God has been doing through him will now be carried on through his sons. He recognized that his death would not end the plan and purpose of God. What God had initiated in Abraham will now be carried on through the sons of Jacob. He is blessing them by passing on to them this favored responsibility.

This is a part of the final ministry of all parents, especially godly parents. One of their last ministries is to pass on to their children responsibility for the carrying on of the work of God.

3. An expression of faith in God.

The writer of Hebrews points to these final acts of Jacob as a special work of faith. It was "by faith" that Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph and his own sons. It was because of his confidence in God that had been gained from a lifetime of walking with God that he is able in his act of final ministry to bless his children and his grandchildren.

On that each of us would be able to relate to our children and grandchildren in our final days as a person of faith. That we would be able to bestow upon them prayers and benedictions that are an expression of our unshakable confidence in God. This final ministry of parents then involves bestowing blessings.

Too many of us have been concerned about leaving some monetary heritage to our children and grandchildren. There is nothing wrong with leaving monetary blessings to them but if you leave monetary blessings without spiritual blessings you may curse them more than you help them.

II. PARENTS HAVE WISDOM TO SHARE.

Our generation may question this insight, but not if we take Biblical admonitions seriously. The Biblical revelation assumes that as a person walks with God as Jacob had walked with God, that along the way they have acquired wisdom. This wisdom becomes available to their children and their grandchildren in their final ministries. We see Jacob exercising such ministry in these extended verses that make up the whole of the forty ninth chapter of Genesis.

While the words in this chapter are called a blessing, they really are more than a blessing. There's prophetic element in these verses: they are predictive. As Jacob has walked with God he has gained insight that he is now able to share with his children and his grandchildren.

1. Wisdom received from the many experiences of life.

When a person walks humbly with his God, God teaches him some things. There are things that one does not learn by reading a book or taking a seminar. They are life lessons. They involve that ability to discern between what is important and what is not important, between what is temporal and what is eternal. As you read this extended chapter in which Jacob addresses each of his sons, beginning with Rueben the oldest and ending with Benjamin the youngest you will sense that they reflect what Jacob has come to know about life. Some of the words come as a rebuke to his sons because he has learned from life that their actions are foolish and destructive. The children and grandchildren who refuse to listen to the wisdom that granddad has gained across the years are only doubling their folly.

2. Wisdom is received by divine illumination.

This is one of the first examples in the Bible of a prophet gift being exercised. As Jacob had walked with God and prayed over his sons and his grandsons, God had given him a vision of their future. The vision of their future is related to the understanding of their character that he had gained. What he does with his sons is share with them the vision that he's received across the years. If they were wise sons they and their descendants

took heed to what Jacob shared with them. Unfortunately their future that we know about indicates that they failed to take heed to what Jacob shared with them on this occasion.

Parents and grandparents, a part of our final ministry is helping mold into the mind of our children and grandchildren a vision of the future that is based upon the truth and the reality of God. May we not be negligent not to pass on to our children such a vision.

III. PARENTS SHOULD RECEIVE HONOR IN THEIR FINAL DAYS.

This may be seen as a part of their final ministry. When parents receive honor from their children and grandchildren, they are blessed - but their children and grandchildren are also blessed. It is a mutual enrichment of life when children enrich their parents and grandparents by giving them proper honor.

1. We should honor them by seeing that their needs are met.

This is another instance in which the character of Joseph shines again. It is inspiring to watch this good man take care of his father in his old age. Moses reports, "So Joseph settled his father and his brothers in Egypt and gave them property in the best part of the land." You will also remember that tender scene between Jacob and Joseph just before his death. Jacob requires of his son a pledge that he will not allow him to be buried in the land of Egypt, but will rather take him back to that land that God has promised to Abraham. In that tender moment between father and son, Joseph makes a pledge that he will indeed do what his father asked of him. When we read on to the end of Genesis we discover that Joseph fulfilled the promise with exactness.

You and I will minister to ourselves as well as our parents when we make sure that the emotional, spiritual, and physical needs of our parents are met in their final days. We should do that without any thought to the cost.

2. Honor will include valuing their words.

I wish we could see the sons of Jacob as a better example at this point, but unfortunately they weren't. They should have been. Any words shared with parents when they come to the end of their lives should be valued. We honor them when we learn from them.

When Alice and I attended the Gaither Praise Gathering in Indianapolis a couple of years ago, we heard the most moving message on honoring your parents that I have ever heard. It was delivered by Albert Warneign Jr. , Jr. He is a gifted Lutheran minister and prolific writer. I want to share with you the story with which Dr. Warnigen closed his message that night. I think you will be blessed by it.

Now that you have heard and seen this testimony, how will we handle our final ministries? How will we who are parents and grandparents exercise our ministry? How will we that are sons and daughters receive their final ministry? Let us learn all we can from the example of Jacob and Joseph.