

# **Youth Group Devotionals**

## **Week 13**

### **Genesis 47:13-50**

This concludes our Genesis Series. We hope that these devotionals have truly impacted your walk with God and have challenged and caused you to grow deeper in your relationship with Him. Be on the lookout for future devotionals (with devos from a larger variety of people)!

Sincerely, the Devo-writing committee ☺

## Principles Pertaining to Prosperity and Poverty

The material for this devo is borrowed from an article I read by Bob Deffinbaugh called "A Proper Perspective of Poverty and Prosperity". This is an extremely important as we continue to see the ways our lives are set up with so many opportunities for us to do well in society and earn a good living. At the same time, we have been challenged as a church to see the poverty around us and in the world and how we are suppose to respond as Christians. Let's see what God is going to share with us in today's text.

Read Genesis 47:13-31

Here it is important to understand the whole story of Joseph. I hope that you have been following with us in this whole series of Genesis devotions and have come along with us in the narrative. If you haven't, I hope that you have time to do that. We get to the point of the story where Joseph is in charge and administering food for Pharaoh. This is an extremely important job as there is a severe famine in the land.

As you read this passage, we see that the verses describe the prosperity of Pharaoh and the people of God in amidst poverty and famine. It is important for us to see several principles which help us to more precisely define the relationship between prosperity and poverty. I have selected just two principles from his article:

**1) Prosperity is not a right, but a privilege and a responsibility.** In the Old Testament God promised Israel prosperity if they would faithfully obey Him and keep His commandments as described in Deuteronomy 15:4-6. But God also made it clear that while this was His promise, this ideal would never be fully realized – "For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you, saying, "You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land" Deuteronomy 15:11. In the book of Proverbs it is oft repeated that prosperity is the result of diligence, while poverty is the result of idleness. Paul in Philippians challenges us to learn the secret of contentment which he has in both poverty and prosperity. Wealth is to be employed in ministry to others. Poverty does not prohibit a genuine desire to minister, while prosperity provides greater opportunity and greater responsibility.

**2) The problem of poverty cannot be solved simplistically.** The simple solution to the problem of the famine in Egypt, we suppose, would have been for Joseph to open up the granaries of Egypt and give the grain to the Egyptians. The question then becomes, "On what basis should the grain be given out?" How would you feel about the fellow who drove up in his new Rolls Royce and asked you to "fill er up" with grain? Welfare is never quite so simple as it first seems. In some scriptures we are told to give to those in need: He who is generous will be blessed, For he gives some of his food to the poor as stated in Proverbs 22:9. Then we see in 2 Thess. 3:10 – "For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: If anyone will not work, neither let him eat."

We have a wide range of responsibilities to the poor because there are a wide variety of reasons for poverty. To those who are willfully poor, that is, those who will not work, we have no obligation but to rebuke them. We must allow their hunger to prod them into activity. For those who are temporarily without funds, we should loan them money with the expectation of being paid back, but not with interest. Others who are completely helpless should be given what they need with no thought of repayment.

Two primary goals should be fixed in our mind regarding charity that really benefits the recipient: First, it should seek to preserve the dignity of the needy; and second, it should promote the diligence of the needy. In Old Testament times the able-bodied who were in need were provided for by leaving sufficient food for them to glean.

I hope that we reflect on the passage and also these principles to allow God shape our hearts, minds and understanding of how God wants us to live as His disciples. It is important for us to see the ways God continues to lead us and gives us wisdom from Him to be able to handle all of life's complexities.

## **The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**

### **Genesis 48**

Having been reunited with his father, we see an astounding interaction between Jacob and his favored son Joseph. Despite all of the suffering both of these men have gone through, the idea that God is the source of blessing and the necessary recipient of praise is evident throughout their conversation. Jacob has a great blessing in store for his sons in Genesis 49, but it is evident that Joseph is still the favored son. Among his brothers, he receives double portion, one for Ephraim and one for Manasseh. It is here in Genesis 48 that we see Jacob giving the blessing to his grandsons, whom he adopts for his own. Its important to note that whoever Jacob blesses, God also blesses, consistent with God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

### **Read Genesis 48**

Jacob is sick and knows he doesn't have much time left. He brings his son Joseph and his now adopted sons Ephraim and Manasseh into his room to give them a blessing. But over the course of the encounter, Jacob reminds the boys of God's hand in Jacob's life and ultimately theirs. He begins by reminding them in Genesis 48:3-4 of how God has kept the promises He made to Jacob. Its both Jacob praising God for what he's done but also reminding Joseph of what God is still doing in the lives of His people. Perhaps there is fear that Joseph will forget the blessing to come and want to stay in Egypt forever, but that is not where God intended them to be.

Again in Genesis 48:15-16 Jacob makes God the center of attention in his encounter with his son. Jacob blesses the boys, the way God wants them to be blessed. Like Jacob over Esau, Jacob also blesses Ephraim, the younger, over Manasseh the first born. Again, Jacob is praising God for how He chose Jacob not based on merit, but by His grace. He is also reminding Joseph that God had much in store for His people, emphasis on the fact that they will at no point deserve it. He reminds Joseph and the boys that it was God who went before Him and led Him as a shepherd, not his own wit or guile.

Finally, in Genesis 48:20-21, Jacob looks to the future for what God will do. He is completely confident that God will follow through with the blessing in their lives so much so that all of Israel (which didn't even exist as a nation yet) would know that it was God at work to bless rather than Ephraim or Manasseh or Joseph working to gain blessing. Once again, Jacob reminds Joseph and the boys that the real blessing is coming. Its not in Egypt, as good as things are now, its in Canaan.

So what then for us? Spend some time reflecting on the blessings that God has given you. We often make the mistake of assuming that God's blessing has to look a certain way. Jacob recognized that the blessing didn't take the form he wanted but rather what God wanted. Remember that the God who led Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph from Ur to Canaan to Egypt and back, is the same God that cares for and leads you now, and the greater blessing is still to come.

## **In Praise of Nobody.**

### **Read: Genesis 49: 1-27**

We are now entering the last verses of the book of Genesis. It is important to bear in mind that Genesis was not written to describe where we all came from. It was written as the beginning to the story of God's chosen people – the nation of Israel. Thus, when we read today's passage, we need to keep in mind that Jacob's blessing of his sons tell, at the same time, what will come to pass.

If you note carefully, each of Jacob's sons will be forerunners to each tribe of Israel. Some of the prophecies were interesting. Keep in mind that Jacob's favorite sons were Joseph and Benjamin. While Joseph certainly had a reassuring prophecy, Benjamin's was simply terrible – "ravenous wolf" is not a compliment. Furthermore, Reuben, Simeon and Levi are the oldest three sons, all of whom – especially Reuben- should receive the choicest blessings from Jacob, which is ancient Jewish custom. However, note that Reuben has committed adultery once (Gen. 35); and Simeon and Levi were responsible for massacring the Canaanites in Shechem (Gen. 34). Thus, it seems that the blessings now fall upon Judah.

Judah is really a nobody. He's not first, but he wasn't last. Nobody cares so much for him. But note: "the scepter will not depart from Judah," indicating the possibility that one day, the nation of Israel will have a king. He will, furthermore, be respected among all nations, he'll get the royal treatment. To top it all off, he's dashing. Indeed, hundreds of years after, the nation of Judah will arise. King David, when he was selected, was a nobody too, the youngest of the sons of Jesse (who's he?). We, as Christians, also know that Jesus is often referred to as the "Lion of Judah", but to his fellow Nazarene neighbors, "wasn't he the son of Joseph?"

And isn't this how God works throughout history, choosing the insignificant to do great things? If you read the New Testament, note that Paul is the only author who had a prestigious background – everyone else were nobodies. Paul is interesting, because he was from the tribe of Benjamin, whom Jacob would describe as "a ravenous wolf; in the morning devouring the prey, and at evening dividing the spoil." This doesn't sound good, does it? How interesting, then, that Paul, with the same ravenous attitude, went throughout the Mediterranean sharing the Gospel with all people, and in the end, "dividing the spoils" to all? Yes, my friends, our God is a redeeming God.

Maybe you feel like a nobody. You're not the one with the perfect GPA. Others seem to have thought the exams were easy-peasy, but you thought it was impossible. Some of you seniors are applying to schools. All your friends got into prestigious programs at prestigious schools, and you feel you might not... measure up. This is a relentless world we live in. We all prize status, qualifications, etc. But God doesn't play human games. Jesus did not play human games. He certainly could've gone through school and become a teacher of the law – a very prestigious position in Jewish society. But no, he went into carpentry. He could've bossed people around since he's God, but no – he served us on bended knee. Not only do nobodies matter to God, but He uses them all the time. So if you think you are a nobody relative to your peers, don't play human games, for God sees you very differently.

## The Good Death

### Read Genesis 49:28-50:14

Part of living a godly life is finishing it in a godly death. Maybe you've been to a funeral before; maybe several, so you might have the ability of a comparison, or maybe not. Personally, I've been to a number of funerals, probably more than is good for someone my age, but the experiences have left me with an understanding of what it means to have a godly death. The death and mourning may not always look the same, but the focus is the same; God. The life and death of a person who has lived in pursuit of God can be so powerful that even non-believers feel presence of God's peace and hope during the period of grief and mourning. It was the same at Jacob's death.

After blessing his sons we see that Jacob gave specific instructions to his sons about where to bury him. This is important because for Jacob it's not just about being buried in the promised land; there is a spiritual significance about being buried in the same place with his forefathers who also lived under the covenantal promise. It is Jacob identifying himself by his relationship to God even after his death.

*How are you living in such a way that those who come after you will identify you by your relationship to God?*

Another thing to note about this passage is how the Egyptians mourned Jacob for seventy days. Israel and his descendents were foreigners and shepherds. Yet, the nation mourns for Jacob. Jacob must've had a tremendous influence by the life that he lived in Egypt in order to have that kind of national effect as a foreigner. I don't know about you, but seventy days for actual ceremonial mourning is a long time. How is it that Jacob came to such recognition in Egypt in such a short time? Not only that but after the official mourning time in Egypt Pharaoh granted Joseph's request to let him return and bury Jacob with his forefathers . . . along with the all of Pharaoh's officials and dignitaries where they continued in mourning and caused such a stir even among the Canaanites that they renamed Jacob's place of burial based on this one funeral! I think in a way it makes Jacob's burial place much more poignant for this ; since the members of Pharaoh's court could have no doubt of the significance of this burial place to both Jacob and his family, and for the promise of the covenant under which they lived. At the same time it's a vivid reminder to Jacob's son through all of this about the purpose of their lives. They may be living in Egypt, but they are pilgrims looking forward to the fulfillment of the promise and the promised land. It's a moment that Jacob arranges in his death for his sons to come to terms with their own relationship with God and their place in the covenant.

*Take some time to consider the ultimate goals that you are pursuing and align yourself with God and his plans for you. Ask for a willing spirit to help you be obedient to the things God desires for you. Ask God to help you understand how to live godly life, and to help you with the love, courage, humility you need to live it.*

## **Mercy When Justice Is Deserved**

A few weeks back, the junior and senior Sunday school class was discussing the story of Philemon. Philemon was a good man, who most likely treated most of his slaves very well. Thus, when one of his slaves, Onesimus, ran away from him, Philemon—who neither mistreated nor hurt Onesimus unnecessarily—was justifiably frustrated and mad. Once found, a runaway slave was returned to his master who would normally scold and punish his slave as he saw fit. Yet, the letter to Philemon centered on Paul's pleading on Onesimus's behalf for Philemon's mercy where justice was deserved. Philemon was fully justified if he punished Onesimus—that's what was just—yet Paul entreats him to remember the mercy Philemon received when he received the gospel and treat Onesimus with likewise mercy.

### **Now read Genesis 50:15-26**

Like Philemon, Joseph would have been fully justified if he had chosen to punish his brothers. His brothers sold him into slavery after all; you can't do much worse than that. His brothers deserved punishment for their actions. Yet, instead of choosing to do what was just, Joseph chose mercy. He knew that he had the right to hurt his brothers as he was hurt (an eye for an eye) but he gave up this right in order to show compassion on his brothers—and by extension, the love and forgiveness of God.

So now we come back to the present. To you. To your specific situation. Have you recently been wronged? Maybe it was really (because most of the time it isn't) ALL THEIR FAULT. Maybe you truly did absolutely nothing to deserve how your friend, family member, or acquaintance treated you. And you probably have a right to be mad and frustrated. But it is far too easy for us humans to jump to judgment. After all, who are we to judge? We make mistakes all the time; besides, God declares in the Bible that vengeance is His and His alone. Not yours, not mine. His. And before our human nature begins coming up with excuses about how we should STILL have the right to be mad at least, let us look no farther than the ultimate act of mercy: Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. After all, all of Genesis is simply a signpost pointing us to Jesus, is it not? And Joseph is just an example of the mercy that was to be for all humanity. Jesus—God Himself—deserved to punish humankind for our rebellion against our Creator, yet chose to embody humility in his humiliating death on the cross, to save us from our sins.

How can we not be moved? How can we still adamantly declare that we deserve to pay someone back for how they've wronged us, when, in fact, this passage, all of Genesis, the whole Bible even points us to the ultimate act of mercy? Forgive my Star Wars allusion, but honestly, let go of your hate. Pray that God will teach you to love as He has loved. And show His mercy and His desire for restoration to your friends today. Who is God putting on your heart that you need—I repeat, NEED—to forgive? I encourage you to prayerfully approach that person today with full forgiveness, keeping in mind that we have already all received the ultimate mercy ourselves.