

Sermon Text for October 16, 2016

By: Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

II Corinthians 13:11-13, Genesis 48:8-16

“God bless you”

Your enemies, Bless them, don't curse them. Romans 12:4

We have two great Scriptures this week which depict a father, or at least a fatherly figure who blesses and draws his children or grandchildren close to him. My father passed away over 10 years ago now, and there are many times when I wish he were here, and honestly, this past week preparing for this sermon was a bit difficult as we get close to the grand finale with Jacob and Joseph and Joseph's children being blessed. When we read about Paul and his blessing of the church in Corinth, as a Father figure, and how important that is in our lives to have a father figure who loves us unconditionally.

So I wander back in my mind to my own father and whenever I open that door, a flood of memories overwhelms me. I remember him teaching me how to play tennis and how happy he was the first time I beat him, I remember him playing basketball with me and teaching me how to foul so the referee couldn't see it, I remember playing golf and never once in my life beating him, and I liked that, you always must have some untouchable side to your father to keep him as father and you as son. I remember his favorite and best known sermon called the three R's, I remember flying to Puerto Rico with him, he was on church business, I was on a US basketball team for my age group and on the way over he tried to give me the talk, you know, the talk, and I had to bail him out.

I think when we open the door this Sunday to see the interaction between Jacob and Joseph, a father and a son, memories will inevitably come flooding out. But it is more often than not those actions and occurrences that we don't remember, that we can't even quantify and put our finger on that makes a person a father. Today we will see that the main responsibility of a father, the defining task of a father is seen in their devotion and dedication to God and their desire, their passion to pass that faith on from one generation to the next. I have personally had a myriad of father figures in my own faith journey, beginning with my biological father to my pastor, my youth pastor, my mentor

and so on. Without any one of these people who have shaped my life by their own lives and their time, I would be a different person today, and I would have suffered for it.

Today we are not just going to take a walk down memory lane, but rather we are going to look at Genesis again which is filled with men of faith, again not perfect examples as only Christ can be, but people that God chose to work with to establish his nation and his people. Today we find the current patriarch Jacob who blesses his grandchildren, the children of Joseph, as a sign that the promise is alive and well and reminding us fathers that our primary responsibility is to pass the promise from one generation to the next by blessing and protecting our children.

If you look at churches across the world you will see that women far outnumber men in attendance. Listen to these statistics. UK: 65 to 35, Australia: 61 to 39, US: 45 to 35, Italy 67 to 33. You know, it used to be the exact opposite scenario in biblical times, we see the Father as the one who passes on the faith from one generation to the next. Now it seems as if the pendulum has swung completely in the other direction.

But our Scripture in Genesis pre-supposes that it is the father who is responsible for the blessing of the children, a blessing which points directly to a passing on of the religious spiritual torch from one generation to the next. The stage is set with two chapters and one sermon left in Genesis and Jacob, the one called Israel after whom the people are called, is on his deathbed. Joseph enters with his two sons, and introduces his children as gifts from God. Jacob is very much aware of the importance of the moment and he cries out how overwhelmed he is by the fact that he had thought that Joseph, his own son, who was lost and now not only is he found but Jacob is also able to bless Joseph's own sons before he dies. What a culmination of his life to not only regain his son, but to pass on the promise that he had received directly from God to the next generation, his grandchildren.

There is one aspect of this encounter which cannot go unnoticed. In Scripture we don't traditionally see grandfathers blessing grandsons. We have a number of fathers blessing their sons, but not grandsons. This is one of those rare occasions, and we have to ask why is this happening? Why isn't Joseph the one who blesses his own sons? Remember Joseph has lived now in Egypt most of his adult life. He is married to an Egyptian woman, his sons have Egyptian names such as Manasseh which means making to forget. Joseph had wanted to forget his family, his land, the place and the people

where the pain had begun in his life. His other son called Ephraim reflected his comfort and his position in Egypt. Ephraim means to be fruitful. So Joseph was much more of an Egyptian than he was an Israelite. It probably reflected also upon the god or the gods that he worshipped. I think he recognizes that he is no longer qualified to pass on God's blessings to his sons.

Jacob in this scene plays the part of the father, not Joseph, in fact when Jacob crosses his hands and messes up the blessing, it is almost like saying the wrong name at a baptism. What does Joseph do but try to correct it, but he fails because he seems more like a foreigner than an agent of God. Jacob takes these children on his knees and hugs and kisses them. In Israel the formalization of an adoption of a child was done by placing the child upon the knee of the soon to be father. Here Jacob tells the world, I will take the responsibility of blessing them, of guiding and directing them today in the way of Almighty God. The promise can and does continue through not Joseph but through his children because of the blessing of his father upon his children. Joseph was able to provide the physical sustenance for the tribe of Israel now his children will provide the spiritual leadership.

When you look at the actual words of the blessing, they should be enough to make you pause and appreciate what is taking place. Yes, the blessing establishes Jacob as the patriarch, but it propels the children into the covenant of promise. The memory is turned into hope. The blessing begins with the memory of the ancestors Abraham and Isaac. It then moves to the personal experiences of Jacob in his own life. The God who has been my shepherd, the angel who has redeemed me. Then the hope of the future begins as he states: This God who is part of our family memory, bless the boys. The future is declared. Let my name, Israel, be perpetuated and let these boys be abundant.

This is how a father is defined. Being able to look over your life and be able to say that all that you said and did was to instill within your children, or within those youth that you have come into contact with, a sense of the promise that is seen in our Lord Jesus Christ and can be theirs. Jacob's life is fulfilled in this one Scripture. We could have skipped all of Scripture from the time he took his brother's birthright and his blessing from Isaac to this scene of him blessing his grandchildren and we would understand that the promise had been dutifully passed on from one generation to another.

If I were to ask you what do most men and fathers feel is their primary responsibility, I would guess that most of you would answer to care for the family by providing food, shelter, clothing. You know the typical hunter gatherer picture comes to mind. This is what Joseph did for his family, he provided enough food for his entire tribe, but when it came to blessing his sons, he wasn't the one to do it but rather the true father, the true patriarch who understood that being a father is not just provision of physical necessities but is especially to provide the spiritual well-being. This is the true definition of the biblical father. God cares more that we lead our family to Christ than bring home the resources to live at a certain level.

We have completely lost that sense that the father has to be involved at all in that aspect of family life. When I was in Prague a few years back, I went to a Jewish ghetto where they had a holocaust museum and there was a photograph in that museum of a crowd of Jewish women and children getting ready to go into the gas chambers. On the front line of the picture there was a woman with her daughter and the woman was covering the eyes of her daughter so that she would not have to view any of the death and carnage that surrounded her. This is the image that I have of a father, a protector, a shepherd which we find so wonderfully in Psalm 23 who hides our eyes when we need them hid and who guides us along.

A father is not defined by age, by gender, or by any biological determination. A father is one who is able to as psalm 103:4 states to save one person from the pit. A father is one who feels comfortable and able to bless in the name of God boys and girls on their spiritual journey. My appeal to you today, my desire, is that each member of this church today would invest in their time, energy, and resources into making sure that the Gospel message is able to be carried on from one generation to another. If we are able to do that, then you will be true fathers.

Listen again to this blessing from II Corinthians and make it your own today and the rest of the days of your life.