

Genesis 49:1-50:14

Jacob Dies

The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said, "“Life can only be understood backwards, but in must be lived forward.” That is to say that every single person is born into this world lacking an instruction manual.

We don't understand the meaning and purpose of life at birth. We need to be taught what it means to be a human being.

“What does it mean to be good or bad?”

“What is the purpose of my life?”

“Where is it all going?”

These are the big questions, all of which are unanswerable at the beginning of our lives. We come to understand life by reflecting on it and by defining it backwards. But we must live it forwards.

This is why parents are so important to the development of their children! Parents help a child define their life; they help children orient themselves within a worldview; they provide meaning and purpose to their kids and say, "This is the point of life, go this way!"

And where do parents get their information and purpose? History!

Now, I don't want to get too philosophical on you this morning, but I think this will be helpful for us. As Christians, we believe that History has meaning and a purpose. And this was a pretty common belief up until about 100 years ago.

In the western world since the time of Augustine, and for at least the next thousand years, World History was taught within this biblical framework. It was taught as the outworking of God's sovereign dealings.

Then in the 17th century, this biblical framework of history morphed into an idea or doctrine of inevitable progress. This was a result of the Enlightenment, and people began to believe that human history was on a path to greatness that would result in our western society becoming a utopia. The Enlightenment took place in the 17th and 18th centuries and was a result of intellectuals who felt that reason was the only absolute. They believed that the scientific method must be applied to all things to find truth and that human intellect and logic were the best way for the world to advance.

The Enlightenment borrowed the promise of a world history that had purpose, and a humanity that was headed somewhere good from the Bible. But then it said, “Man and Reason can get us there.”

The enlightenment thought that all of our problems were a result of bad

information. If people had good education and they were logical, then the world could become a better place. Evil was just a societal construct. It wasn't real.

But then the two World Wars took place and people saw that one of the most intellectual nations on earth, where reason and human advancement were the highest virtue, used those virtues as justification to exterminate 6 million people who they believed were somehow less than human.

In World War II our world saw the personification of evil in Hitler and his regime. That was a crippling blow to the Enlightenment's worldview. This led us into "Modernity" and now our Western society is considered "Post-modern" or "Trans-modern". But what does that even mean?

It means a large variety of things, but one thing that it most definitely means is that history is now just "what was" and has no purpose. Humanity is not headed anywhere. There is no end goal or telos, and no meaning that humanity is moving toward.

But how does this affect us today? Listen to this quote by Missionary Leslie Newbegin:

"In the closing decades of this century it is difficult to find Europeans who have any belief in a significant future which is worth working for and investing in. A society that believes in a worthwhile future saves in the present so as to invest in the future. Contemporary Western society spends in the present and piles up debts for the future, ravages the environment, and leaves its grandchildren to cope with the results as best they can."

Right now our debt, as of August 29th, 2013 is 16.7 Trillion Dollars. To put it in another way, if there is no point in history, then there is no point in the story as a whole, and therefore there is no point in my own action. If the story is meaningless, any action of mine is meaningless.

This is how our culture views history, and our story as humanity. This is a direct result of abandoning our Biblical narrative, the Biblical story of history. Remember, "Life can only be understood backwards," so if you lose your history – if you lose the ability to see the meaning and purpose of life from the past - you will inevitably waste your life by living your life forward in the wrong direction.

This is why we study Genesis! Biblical History tells us who we are and how we got here; but it also fills our life with meaning and purpose as we journey toward our end (Telos) together. It propels us forward. It tells us where we're headed. The Enlightenment can't, Post-Modernism can't, Secularism Cant, even science itself can't.

You might ask, with many others,
“Why should I believe this story?”
“Why should I see history this way?”

Because everyone lives their life in light of some story, (whether you're a hedonist, secularist, materialist, moralist, deist, etc.). BUT THIS ONE IS BEST! It's true. It makes sense. It's beautiful.

The story of humanity that is found in the Scriptures answers these big questions for us. “Where did I come from? What is my purpose? Where are we headed? Why are things not the way they feel like they should be?”

As a pastor it is part of my job, to teach you this story. And then as you come to see it as true and beautiful, it will begin to shape your life. And you are meant to share that story with your kids to send them forward in life with a purpose.

That is what we see in today's text of Scripture. Jacob, one of Israel's patriarchs, and one of our Fathers in the faith, is on his deathbed. He's got twelve sons, and he's concerned for them like a good dad should be.

Psalm 127 says that children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb, a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!

This is why we love kids. They are a blessing from the Lord and the Psalmist says that we are blest to have a quiver full of them. He's saying that kids are like arrows and the more the merrier, right?

But what are arrows for? They are not some kind of hot accessory. Arrows aren't just made to look good in a quiver. Arrows are made to be shot. Arrows have a purpose; they are meant to be sent out into the world with direction and purpose. And so are our children.

As Christian parents, it is our job -our high calling from God- to saturate our kids in a biblical backstory for their life, so that they know why they're here, what they are here for, and where they are headed. We See Jacob do just that, in Chapter 49. He pulls his bow back, and launches each one of his sons into his destiny.

Lets jump in! Genesis 49:1. Each father is the prophet of his own household. Jacob says “Let me tell you what is going to happen...”

Jacob recounts the story of God in his life. “Jacob is who I was, but Israel is who God has made me.” His authority is derived from his anointing by God. His election and calling has given him confidence, boldness, and a backbone! But

we also see that the grace he's received has kept him humble.

Parents, as your kids grow up they need to know your past. They need to know some of your history. What has God saved you from? Who were you before being born again? Were you a moral person who thought God liked good people? Were you a rebel who sought your own identity in partying and attention?

Each of the boys gets a blessing or a curse, and according to V.28 each blessing or curse was "suitable to him." Parents, this is fascinating! Jacob goes from oldest to youngest and he doesn't candy coat anything. He curses his brash and rebellious sons and blesses his obedient ones.

"Children obey your parents so that it will go well for you," Paul writes to the church in Ephesus. But the flip side of that scripture is also true, you don't obey and it will not go well for you. It is important that we tell our kids this.

Douglas Wilson, in his book *Future Men: Raising boys to fight giants* says that our kids should know that if they apostatize, if they step away from the Christian faith when they grow up, they will be disinherited. I read that and thought, "Dang, that's harsh. That's pretty judgmental." But then this week as I was studying this text, I saw the wisdom in it.

When Jacob gives his blessing or curse, He preaches to each one of his kids a prophetic sermon based on where this kid has been and where he is going and he pulls no punches. Man, this is just tough. I pray that I would never have to say this stuff to one of my kids.

But it is important that our kids know that to step away from our faith -to apostatize- is to take upon you a curse. Parents, we can't take the hard and sharp edges off of our faith. Our kids need to know, if they turn their back on God, then bad things are going to happen. It will not go well for them.

If I had the time I would go through each of these blessings, but I don't so we are just going to focus in on the most important one, and for the first time in along time it's not the blessing of Joseph.

It's the blessing of Judah, Jacob's rebellious and sinful son who came to Christ late in life, repented of his sins and stepped up to lead the family spiritually.

49:8-11 says, "This scepter shall not depart from Judah." What does this mean?

1. Judah will be supreme
2. Judah will be like a lion
3. Judah will be the leader

And we get very visual here in the description of Judah. We've got lions, tigers and bears here; lions, scepter, staff, milk, donkey, foal, vine, wine, grapes, and so on.

What this shows us is that Israel's Messianic expectations are getting clearer and clearer.

Genesis 3:16 - Patriarchs – Judah's prophecy gets partially fulfilled with the Davidic dynasty. But then the nation of Israel gets carried off into slavery and all the line of kings is destroyed- Isaiah prophesies that there is still another one coming; he's coming from the line of David and will save God's people from their sins. But he will also be a suffering savior - Jesus fulfills these prophecies and according to Hebrews 7:14 He was directly descended from Judah

The story tells us that it never comes the way we think it will. There's always a twist and another scene/chapter.

When Jesus showed up, and angels declared his arrival many people believed that the throne was going to be returned to Judah. David's dynasty would be reinstated. God's people would once again have a nation and a king. Jesus is the long awaited and promised King from the line of David that has descended from Judah. He's the lion. He's supreme. He's the leader. He's the king. But then Jesus dies - God's story takes a different twist than was expected. Jesus rises from death, is seen by over 500 witnesses and then ascends back into heaven where he rules at the right hand of God in heaven right now while we serve his mission of making disciples and telling the world of his story of redemption. And then still to come in the future, Jesus is going to return and all believers will be united in the new creation where he will rule openly for eternity.

See, As Christians we are the only ones who can really understand history because we are the only ones who know the point of all history. I know that is an outlandish claim. I realize that it sounds incredibly arrogant and intolerant.

But for the Christian, we know that the point of all history and the point of all the future is Jesus. Ephesians 1:10 tells us that God has an ultimate plan in creation: to unite Heaven and Earth through Jesus.

He's going to sum everything up in Christ. The whole point of history was to reveal Jesus to us, and the whole point of the future is to reveal Jesus to as many people as possible and then Jesus will unite the heavens with the earth and we will dwell with him forever.

So in V.33 Jacob preached to his kids; and now he pulls his feet under the covers and is gathered to his people. I love that statement. For the Christian, Death has been defeated. Jesus conquered the grave so now, "To live is Christ and to die is gain," says the apostle Paul.

And Jacob gives his kids a great legacy to live up to. This is how you go out. Jacob dies, and points his kids to Jesus. Jacob's young life was dominated by his quest for "the blessing." He sought the blessing in money, in a birthright, in an inheritance, in a woman, in a few more women, in his career; but never found it. He never could find what he was looking for.

But then, through Jesus Jacob received it in spite of his striving. It was a gift of God's grace.

Dads: one thing I want us to remember is that Jacob didn't lead his family very well for the early part of his life. But he repented! He's sought God. He's changed and now on his deathbed, he's commanding his sons. He's leading. He's found the meaning of life and he's going out pointing to Jesus.

And that is exactly what happens. These boys become the twelve tribes of Israel, and Jesus, the very Son of God, descends from Judah to bless the whole world.

And parents, this is crucial for us to see. The story is not over yet. This history has a purpose, Jesus is building his Church. He's bringing people to the Father with the goal of uniting all of heaven with all of the Earth. And those of us who have been born again by faith in Jesus, we are now a part of this story.

We've got work to do. Jesus is using us, his Church, to make disciples. We are here to tell people about Jesus, the purpose of all history and all the future. It's all about Jesus. We're meant to go out like Jacob, pointing to Jesus.

Are you living a life that is pointing people to Jesus? If not, you're doing it wrong. You are wasting your life. You haven't defined your life backwards, so that you know how to live it forwards.

Jesus said as much himself when he said, "I am the resurrection and the life" Jesus wasn't like all the other prophets that have come into the world. Jesus isn't like Muhammad or Buddha. Jesus didn't come like so many other great teachers before and since him who have pointed to the way to find meaning and purpose. Jesus made a totally unique claim. Jesus said, "I am God. I am the resurrection. I am the way." Jesus was unique. He didn't say there's a way. He said, "I am the way."

In closing, read closely this famous statement from C.S. Lewis:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a

lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. ... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.”