

## The Fruitful Life • Genesis 49:22

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. *Jacob's Last Words*

1. A man's last words say a lot about him; about the quality of his life and his faith in God.
2. They're the distilled essence of his entire experience and the years he's walked this earth.
3. Ch. 49 of Genesis gives us Jacob's Last Words.
  - a. here we find the grandson of Abraham speaking to his 12 sons.
  - b. they're all grown men now, with their own wives and children.
  - c. but Jacob has called them to his bedside because he knows he has just a short time to live.
  - d. and before he leaves, he must impart to them some special words and instruction.
  - e. indeed, God has given him words to speak over each of them by way of *prophecy*.

#### B. *Prophecy*

1. So as the 12 are gathered round him, Jacob fixes his eyes on each one, starting with Reuben, the eldest, and working his way to Benjamin, the youngest.
2. To each, he speaks words which cut right to the heart of each man's soul, perfectly diagnosing his character and describing his relationship with God.
3. These temperaments not only mark each of the sons of Jacob, they end up laying the foundation for the future of each of the tribes of Israel which will come from them.
4. So what Jacob says here to each of his sons is prophetic – it describes the future of each tribe, of each of these sons' descendants.

### II. TEXT

#### A. *Set the Scene*

1. The second to the youngest was Joseph, the firstborn of Jacob's favored wife, Rachel.

2. We've been studying Joseph's amazing story over the last couple weeks.
  - a. when only 17, he was sold by his jealous brothers into slavery in Egypt.
  - b. for 13 years, Joseph suffered as a slave and then as a prisoner, being falsely accused of attempted rape by an Egyptian official's wife.
  - c. then he was miraculously promoted to the role of prime minister of all Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself in power.
  - d. it was in this capacity that his brothers appeared before him one day, having traveled to Egypt to secure supplies during a famine.
    - 1) they didn't recognize him, but he recognized them
    - 2) and put them to the test to see what kind of men they'd become during the last 22 years.
    - 3) when Joseph was confident they'd grown to regret their ill-treatment of him so many years before and that they had truly repented, he revealed himself to them.
  - e. Joseph knew that there were 5 years yet to go in the drought and famine and that his father and brothers could not survive it if they remained in Canaan,
  - f. so he persuaded them to migrate to Egypt where there were plenty stores of food and grain.
  - g. thus, after 22 years, Jacob was finally reunited with his favorite son;
  - h. a reunion Jacob had never even dared to hope for, thinking Joseph had been killed by some wild beast over 20 years before.
3. In Ch. 49, Jacob is now in Egypt, breathing what he knows are his last breaths and so passing on to his sons the final words of fatherly blessing.
4. He saves the *best* blessing for the son most deserving of it – Joseph . . .

## **B. Vs. 22-26**

**22 Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a well;  
His branches run over the wall.**

**23 The archers have bitterly grieved him, Shot *at him* and hated him.**

**24 But his bow remained in strength, And the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty *God* of Jacob (From there *is* the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),**

**25 By the God of your father who will help you, And by the Almighty who will bless you *with* blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath, Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.**

**26 The blessings of your father Have excelled the blessings of my ancestors, up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.**

1. We'll be taking a closer look at Jacob's blessing on Wednesday; this morning I want to concentrate on the first part – v. 22.

**Joseph *is* a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; His branches run over the wall.**

2. Keep in mind that as Jacob speaks to each of his sons here, he's diagnosing their *spiritual condition*.

3. Joseph is a fruitful bough –

a. Jacob paints the poetic picture of a tree laden with fruit.

b. it's abundant because the tree is *well-watered*.

c. and it's so healthy it's branches reach far out giving fruit, not just to the orchard owner, but to anyone who passes by.

4. My teen years were spent in Orange County – back in the days when they actually had orange trees and groves in Orange County.

5. Not far from my friend's house, was a private orchard with a pomegranate tree growing right next to the brick fence.

a. it was an ancient thing with branches that hung out over the top of the wall.

b. when the fruit was ripe, we'd hoist each other up and pluck some to enjoy.

6. That's the image Jacob presents of Joseph.

- a. his is a life that brings blessing to others.
  - b. they enjoy goodness because it drops from him like fruit from a tree.
7. The reason *why* Joseph is a fruitful bough, is because he's *well watered*.
8. Really, the image Jacob paints of Joseph is that he isn't the *whole* tree, he's just *one branch* of it.
- a. his fruitfulness is enabled because of his solid union with the trunk, which draws *its* life from the well.
  - b. Jacob knows Joseph's fruitfulness lies in the fact that he's the faithful descendant or branch of Abraham to whom God had made such great and glorious promises;
    - 1) Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the trunk
    - 2) and the life of the entire tree was sustained by the Lord Himself
    - 3) He is the well of living water
  - c. Jacob knew that because of Joseph's intimate trust in the Lord, those promises of God to Abraham were finding their fulfillment and fruition in him.
  - d. Joseph's life was a testimony to the faithfulness of God to Abraham, and to all those who like Abraham, will look to him in unwavering faith.
9. As we've seen so clearly over the last couple weeks, Joseph maintained his faith and trust in the Lord -
- a. even when his circumstances were dark and desperate.
  - b. it was this *abiding relationship* that enabled Joseph to become such a rich source of blessing to others.
  - c. and Jacob paints it like a fruit-laden bough.

### **C. The Fruitful Life**

1. What Jacob said to Joseph, Jesus said to His disciples in John 15.

**<sup>1</sup>"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.**  
**<sup>2</sup>Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself,**

**unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. <sup>5</sup>“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.**

2. These two passages, from Genesis 49 and John 15 go side by side.
3. Joseph’s life becomes the *template* and *example* for us as we follow Christ.
4. Just as Joseph drew his life and strength from the Lord, so do you and I.
  - a. we aren’t the vine, we are only the branches.
  - b. and like any branch, we only live as we are connected to the vine.
    - 1) the tighter that connection, the more solid our union -
    - 2) the *stronger* we are and more fruitful we will be.
5. What does Jesus say the Father is looking for from us? Fruit! Spiritual fruit!
6. That fruit is defined in Galatians 5 as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, & self-control.
7. But let’s be honest, such sweet fruit doesn’t come from us *naturally!*
8. This is *supernatural* fruit, and it demands special attention to produce.
9. That’s why Jesus says that He’s the vine – He’s the source of our life!
10. And if we’re to produce this special fruit, we need a skilled gardener, someone who knows how to mold and shape us so that we’ll attain *maximum* fruitfulness.
11. God the Father takes this task – *He* is our vinedresser.
12. Jesus tells us part of the process of spiritual growth and fruitfulness is *being pruned*.

**<sup>2</sup>Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.**

- a. now, at first sight, pruning seems *contrary* to fruit-bearing
- b. after all, if growth is what you’re looking for, why would you *cut* some of the plant *away*?

13. As fruit vines grow, where the branches join the main vine, little shoots often begin called “sucker shoots.”
  - a. these sucker shoots grow rapidly but never produce fruit, just leaves.
  - b. they sap the nearby branch of life so that it remains barren.
14. The vinedresser cuts off these sucker shoots as soon as they sprout so that the life of the vine will flow into the branch and produce fruit.
15. All along the length of the branch, the vinedresser snips, channeling the life and energy of the branch into one thing – fruit!
16. We see God’s pruning and care in Joseph’s life.
  - a. there were some sucker shoots of pride and foolishness as a youngster when he told his family of his dreams of greatness.
  - b. the Lord cut these off in putting him in the role of a servant and prisoner.
  - c. then God channeled his life and energy into the field of administration, constantly bending his circumstances and life to this task so that he would produce excellence in this capacity –
  - d. an excellence that would bear fruit in saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of people when he rose to the position of prime minister of Egypt and oversaw a government run feeding program during an intense 7 year famine.
  - e. Jacob endured 13 years of God’s pruning to become a fruitful bough.

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  - f. just as God pruned Joseph, He prunes us
    - 1) the Holy Spirit comes and carefully inspects us,
    - 2) looking for those little shoots that would sap our spiritual strength and vitality –
    - 3) those sins and carnal attitudes that if allowed to grow will strangle our walk with God
17. What sustained Joseph throughout his time of pruning was *one thing* –the one thing Jesus tells us to do in John 15 – Hang on!

**4Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. <sup>5</sup>“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.**

18. It's crucial we understand what Jesus is calling us to here – to just abide in Him, to hang on to Him.
  - a. just as the branch draws it's life from the vine, we draw our life from Christ.
  - b. the branch doesn't need to *worry* about bearing fruit or about *pruning itself*.
  - c. the branch needs to do one thing – just hang in there – just stay connected to the vine.
19. That's what Joseph did – in the midst of his slavery and imprisonment, in the midst of being falsely accused and forgotten, it was easy to be confused and discouraged, wondering what was going on and if God knew what he was doing.
20. But Joseph didn't draw his life from his circumstances, he drew it from God.
  - a. and though he didn't know what was going on, He knew God did.
  - b. so he resigned himself into the Lord's keeping and just hung on,
  - c. KNOWING that the Lord would bring him through!

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. God's At Work

1. Friend, God is at work in your life!
2. What He's at work doing is molding and shaping you to produce fruit.
3. He's pruning and snipping, channeling the life of Christ in you toward spiritual maturity and fruitfulness .
4. What do you do? Abide in Christ! Just hang in there. Don't give up – hang on, and in God's time, the harvest will come!
5. How do we abide in Christ – by cultivating our relationship with Him!
  - a. there's no substitute for daily devotions.
  - b. reading the Word of God, prayer, worship
6. What does a fruit tree need if it's going to produce fruit?
  - a. soil, water, sunshine, air
  - b. spiritual fruitfulness is enabled by abiding in Christ,
  - c. and *that* means
    - 1) having our roots deeply in *God's Word*

- 2) staying connected to Him through *prayer*
- 3) and living in the light of His presence.
7. Many Christians are frustrated that they don't see more fruit from their lives.
  - a. but truth be told, they're not abiding in Christ.
  - b. they rarely pick up their bible
  - c. they only pray when they're in trouble
  - d. and they only think about God when they're at church.
8. They have plenty of time for TV or entertainments, but complain they just don't have time to spend with the Lord.

### **B. Our Orange Tree**

1. We have an orange tree in our backyard that produces a huge crop of oranges all year long!
2. What would happen if I lopped off one of the main branches and dropped it on the ground?
3. That branch would wither and die – it would certainly produce no more fruit!
4. The key to our fruitfulness is to *abide* in Christ.
5. He is the vine, and we are the branches.
6. As we simply make it our aim to abide in Christ, to immerse ourselves in Him, then God will work in our lives to mold and shape us to become a fruitful people.

### **C. Simple**

1. Friends – I know that life can seem confusing and complex.
2. We look around at all the turmoil, at all the obligations and duties that are laid upon us at home, at work, even at church and feel overwhelmed.
3. What we see in the example of Joseph, and what Jesus says here reminds us that above all the confusion and complexity of life is a singular, simple truth – Our life is IN CHRIST.
4. Abiding in Him is THE THING – and if we have that – He'll take care of the rest!