

Genesis 187  
Finishing Well  
Genesis 49:1-4  
January 5, 2025  
Dr. Andy Woods

Let us take our Bibles this morning and open them to Genesis 49. The title of our message this morning is "Finishing Well." We have an example here of three people who will be in the Millennial Kingdom, but they did not finish well. These are examples for us to learn from. I do not want to be the kind of Christian who is saved by grace, but does not finish well. I want my life to finish well and to count for eternity. This all comes up in our verse-by-verse teaching through the Book of Genesis that we have been doing.

The second part of the Book of Genesis is about three people: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through whom God started the Nation of Israel. Israel is a very important nation, because through Israel will come His blessings to the entire world. We need the Nation of Israel because the world is in a lot of trouble—Genesis 1-11 explains why.

The story of Joseph, which is told in Genesis 37-50, is so critical because Joseph has played this monumental role, not in beginning the Nation of Israel, but in preserving the Nation of Israel. God's plan was to get Israel out of Canaan (where they most likely would have morally destructed), and into Egypt, to a place called Goshen, where Israel would be incubated for 400 years. God's man whom He has used in that endeavor is this man named Joseph.

Now we are at the tail end of the Joseph account—the tail end of the Book of Genesis. Jacob, the great patriarch, is about to die, and he will summon his sons (whom I call Jacob's Dozen because they are the ones who are going to become the Twelve Tribes of Israel). Jacob gives specific prophecies over each son.

Jacob Blesses His Sons (Genesis 49:1-33)

- I. Call (1)
- II. Introduction (2)
- III. Jacob's blessings on his sons (3-27)
- IV. Jacob's death (29-33)

We can break down Genesis 49 in this way: There is a call—Jacob calls the sons together. There is an introduction. The bulk of the chapter is Genesis 49:3-27, where he is speaking prophecies (or utterances) over his sons—Jacob's Dozen. Then there is a concluding summary at the end; and the chapter ends with Jacob's death.

In Genesis 49:1 you see this call of Jacob, as he calls these sons together. It says, "Then Jacob summoned his sons." He is ready to die. These are his final words that God has given him, but they are prophecies also. It says,

*"Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, 'Assemble yourselves that I may*

*tell you what will befall you in the days to come."*

Some of your English translations translate that as the "latter days." "I am going to give you a series of predictions that will happen not just to you, but the tribes that you bring forth in the latter days." The context of this entire thing is the prophetic future yet coming. The reason he has called these sons together is he wants to tell them prophetically what is going to happen in the latter days.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum, in his Genesis commentary, says,

"The 'latter days' is a term found thirteen times in the Old Testament ... It is consistently used of the distant prophetic future."<sup>1</sup>

A parallel for this is Deuteronomy 33. If you really want to understand God's plan and program for the Twelve Tribes of Israel, there are two chapters of the Bible that you should study: the one that we are entering into now, Genesis 49, and there is a parallel passage in Deuteronomy 33.

As we will be studying, the Nation of Israel would ultimately, after 400 years of bondage, come out of Egypt. They would get to Mount Sinai and receive the Law of Moses, and then they would make their trajectory up north, where that first generation, because of unbelief, would be derailed from entering the Promised Land. That second generation would move around east in an area that we call the Transjordan, east of the Jordan River, Moses leading that second group as well. Moses, at the ripe old age of 120, just like Jacob at the ripe old age of 147, would say, "I am ready to die."

Here are some prophecies that will be made by Moses to these tribes, as Moses died there in the Transjordan on Mount Nebo, never having entered the Promised Land. As he is ready to die he gives a series of prophecies (Deuteronomy 33), just as Jacob, here in Egypt prior to his death, gives a series of prophecies concerning Jacob's Dozen.

If you want to understand the Bible, the way to understand it is to let the Bible say what it wants to say at the beginning, because the Bible is not going to re-explain itself as you get into the latter sections of it. It assumes a knowledge base or an understanding before you move into latter sections of Scripture.

That is why I call these two tremendous chapters, Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33, the spine of the rest of the Bible. Why are things happening in the Old Testament, and the New Testament, and the future? Why do they happen the way that they happen? Because God cannot lie and He gives a series of predictions concerning what would happen to each tribe—Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 33.

That is why we are going to move into this, and we are going to take our time with it. One of my greatest fears for Christians (and I know this can happen because it happened to me many, many times in my Christian life), is this: I am in a new year, and I have pledged, perhaps, to read the Bible in a year. If that is your New Year's resolution, praise the Lord; but what you are going to discover is that this Bible is a pretty big book. There is a lot

---

<sup>1</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Genesis*, 632.

going on here.

We put ourselves under these schedules to make it through the Bible in a year—I am not against that, I think people should do that—but my fear is that we are so eager to meet the schedule that we are reading over a bunch of stuff that we really do not understand.

When we get into the rest of the Bible, we do not understand why this is happening and that is happening. It is a lot like going to the movies, and you arrive five minutes late and there is some little piece of data that you missed right at the beginning, and the rest of the movie is a mystery to you. If we were on time, popcorn in hand, absorbing the first five minutes, the rest of the movie would make sense.

I am fearful that that is what is happening to a lot of Christians rushing through their Bible trying to make a quota. This happened to me for years and years and years. The Bible just did not make sense to me because I was not absorbing what God had for me at the beginning. That is how I feel about Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33.

Jacob, ready to die, has made this call to his sons. Then you go to Genesis 49:2 and you see an introduction there. There is a call to an assembly, meaning "come together." Genesis 49:2: "Gather together." Which is a good thing to do. Hebrews 10:25 says,

*"Not forsaking your own assembling together, as is the habit of some."*

I think of growing up in Southern California, going to the mountains sometimes, and you are there for the weekend and you have a campfire going, and Smokey the Bear says, "Put out the fire before you leave the campground." How do you put out a campfire? One way to do it is you take the coals that are smoldering there and you separate them, and when they are separated, they go out faster.

That is what lone-ranger Christianity is like. A lot of Christians are Christians without a church. They are not committed to a local church—"I can serve Jesus and worship Him under this tree" mentality. They are off by themselves; they are isolated. That is exactly where the devil wants them; because when you are isolated you are a coal—your fire will go out quickly.

This is not the loss of salvation I am talking about. I am talking about loss of productivity, fruitfulness in the Christian life. When we are together, as we are this morning, "iron sharpens iron." We are being challenged and stimulated to higher heights in God. You are conversing with people; you are talking with people; and you are fellowshiping around the fellowship meal. The Holy Spirit is using all of that to bring us to a level of gratitude and service that He has for us in the new week. How difficult it is for the Christian that forsakes that.

I understand that we get all of the emails that people cannot find a church. Our reaction to that is, "Start a church." You do not have to call it a church, just call it a Bible study. "We do not have a teacher at our Bible study." We put all of our stuff out on the internet. Use that until you get someone there that can be more of a teacher, and at least you are coming together regularly in a small group setting and you are encouraging each other. You are fortifying each other; you are edifying each other; and you are ready for the week.

It is very difficult to do that if you are practicing lone-ranger Christianity.

A lot of Christians out there are looking for the perfect church. Let me let you in on a little secret: there are no perfect churches. The people in the church have the exact same sin nature as anywhere else. "I cannot go to that church. There are too many hypocrites in that church." Our reaction to that is, "We always have room for one more hypocrite. Come in, come join us." The truth of the matter is, if you find a perfect church do not join it, because you'll ruin it.

We have this really unrealistic expectation of church. You are going to come to church, and there is going to be give and take. There is going to be some irritation, but God still commands us to come together regularly because He knows that we need each other. You may not like the person sitting next to you, but you need that person and they need you. You have something to offer them that they do not have and vice versa. There is always this calling amongst God's people to come together—to assemble yourselves.

Then Jacob says something else here. After he says, "Come together" to his Dozen, he says,

*"Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob;  
And listen to Israel your father" (Genesis 49:2).*

Listen—as my mom used to tell me, "God gave us one mouth and two ears. Use them in proportion." It is hard to listen when we are always doing the talking, but there is a place to just come and be fed and to listen to the things of God. Israel was commanded to do this, constantly. For example, in the Book of Deuteronomy, there is something called the great Hebrew "shema." "Shema" is a Hebrew word that just means "listen."

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 says,

*"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!...These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down, and when you rise up."*

These are tremendous parenting principles there, but notice how the whole thing is prefaced, "Hear, O Israel!" Listen.

What did Jesus say to each of those seven churches in Asia minor in the Book of Revelation?

*"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"*  
(Revelation 2:7).

There is an idea where we are coming to the Lord, we are gathering together and we are attentive—we are listening. What does God have to say to me? What does God have to say through people in the church to me? Maybe there is something in the sermon for you. Maybe God is going to speak to you in a very special way. Something that you could not grasp or understand had we not obeyed God's call to come together and to listen.

James 1:19, speaking to the

*"This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger."*

This becomes one of the ways I know this book, the Bible, is from God; because my inclination is the opposite. I am usually the last to hear, the first to speak, and the first to get upset. That is my natural tendency, and God's Word diagnoses our human hearts so accurately. He says, "Be the opposite of what you naturally want to be. Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. So huddle up—listen up. Here are the prophecies that will befall the various Tribes in the last days."

By the way, did you catch the switch in names there in Genesis 49:2?

*"Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob; and listen to Israel your father."*

Remember, Jacob's name was changed to Israel in Genesis 32:28. What you find, as you move through the Bible, is that those two names concerning the Nation of Israel are used synonymously—interchangeably. In fact, that is what is happening in the Great Tribulation period. It says,

*"Alas! For that day is great;  
There is none like it;  
And it is the time of Jacob's distress,  
But he will be saved from it" (Jeremiah 30:7).*

When I am in Jeremiah 30:7 I know who Jacob is. Jacob is Israel because I read the Book of Genesis, the Book of Beginnings. Nowhere else in the Bible is this interchange between Israel and Jacob going to be explained. The rest of the Bible presupposes that we understand what happened in Genesis, and you cannot understand the rest of the Bible without the Book of Genesis.

#### Beginning Themes

Universe	Religion
Life	Salvation
Man	Language
Marriage	Government
Evil	Nations
Clothing	Israel

Morris, *Genesis Record*, 18-20.

You cannot even understand life around you without the Book of Genesis, because Genesis is the Book of Beginnings: beginning of the universe, life, man, marriage, evil, clothing, religion, salvation, language, government, nations, Israel. We are made aware of all of these things because of the Book of Genesis.

This is what you call Genesis 49:2: Hebrew parallelism in Hebrew poetry. Our poetry rhymes sounds, but the Hebrews rhymed or paralleled ideas. When you take a look at a verse like Genesis 49:2, you have to take both lines into consideration and figure out what is the dominant thought being expressed in Genesis 49:2. You have to study those two lines together carefully. There are not two points being made here, there is one point.

This is an example of what we call synonymous Hebrew parallelism, where the second line repeats what is in the first line, but in different words—synonymous Hebrew parallelism. That is why Jacob's name is called Jacob early in the verse and then it switched to Israel. God expects us to understand that Jacob's name has been changed to Israel and those names are used synonymously here, and in the rest of the Bible for that matter.

We are coming out of Genesis 49, where all of these prophecies are going to be given over Jacob's Dozen. How do we handle this material? Arnold Fruchtenbaum writes this:

"Before detailing Jacob's prophecy, the following five observations can be noted. First, the order of the sons as Jacob deals with them is not the same as found in Genesis 30-31, except for the first four."<sup>2</sup>

Now, when we were studying the birth of these sons, who would become the progenitors of the Twelve Tribes, there was a birth order. Here Jacob is taking things out of that arrangement. He is not following the normal birth order. The Fruchtenbaum quote goes on and it says,

"Second, the actual order runs as follows. He begins with the sons of Leah: Reuben, Simeon, and Levi; and Judah, Zebulun, and Issachar. Then he deals with the sons of the handmaids, beginning with Bilhah's son Dan. He then deals with Zilpah's two sons, Gad and Asher; then back to Bilhah's other son Naphtali. At the end of the list, he then deals with the sons of Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin. Third, except for Zebulun, no specific locations are given; and even for Zebulun, the emphasis is on what he will become, not where he will be."<sup>3</sup>

These are not necessarily prophecies dealing with specific areas of geography. There is a little bit of that in here, but that is not the primary emphasis of these prophecies. These prophecies are dealing with the character, if you will, of these twelve sons and the tribes that they begat.

It says,

"He will become a people of commerce. Fourth, Jacob prophesied the future and not the sites of the Tribes, in keeping with the emphasis...on what will befall you in the latter days."<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Genesis*, 634-35.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 634-35.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 634-35.

These are prophecies that are going to be fulfilled in Old Testament history. I think a lot of them are being fulfilled today. Some of the prophecies will deal with the earthly or Millennial Kingdom to come, but it is all here in what we might call the spine of the Bible—Genesis chapter 49.

*"Fifth, the future history of the tribes is viewed as an outgrowth of the present character of each son. The character of each son, to some degree, becomes the character of his tribe."<sup>5</sup>*

This is very important to understand, because as the saying goes, "The apple does not fall far from the tree." Show me the character of the parents and I will show you, to a very large extent, the character of the descendants.

You remember this happened with one of Noah's sons, Ham, who did something sinful in Genesis 9. From Ham came the Canaanites who followed the detestable practices of their progenitor (this is not racial the way it is wrongly taught, it is moral). That is why Canaan became as corrupt as it did, to the point where God, through Joseph, got His people out of Canaan for a season.

In my very first pastorate in Pico Rivera, California, I was under a pastor who was older. He was retiring, and he said to me something that I do not think I will ever forget. He said, "I want you to observe the parents and the children in this church. There are many, many parents that will use this church as a babysitting service. They drop the kids off. They are alleviated from responsibilities with the kids for a couple hours. The parents go off and do their own thing, and they come and pick the kids up a couple of hours later."

He said, "Compare that to another group of parents within this church that actually come to the church when their kids are here. When the kids are here, they are here. If the kids are here for two hours, they are here for two hours. In other words, they are not using the church as a babysitting service. They are role modeling in the home the importance of church attendance."

He said to me, "Inevitably, what happens is that children will reach a certain point as young adults where they will start making their own choices." He said, "What you will discover is that the kids of the parents that made the church a babysitting service, once they reach the age of their own decision making, will not come to church anymore. They will bypass the church. They will make excuses not to come to church."

Of course, that would happen, because that is what they saw role-modeled all those years. By contrast, the parents that are at the church with the kids, those kids, when they become adults, have a tendency to stick with the church. That is what is largely happening here with these tribes. The apple does not fall too far from the tree. A lot of the bad behavior that is predicted related to these various tribes, you can see it, if you will, in the character of the progenitors of those tribes.

That is a word of warning to us. You can preach church attendance to your children all you want, but the loudest sermon they are ever going to hear is when you take church

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 634-35.

attendance seriously. You can preach to your children, until you are blue in the face, about the importance of prayer and Bible reading.

It is a totally different matter when you assume your mantle as the high priest of the home and you say, "Okay, Mom, Dad, children, let's get together for a season of prayer." Then you are practicing that within the home. That is the loudest sermon that these young minds could ever hear, because they do not see it spoken of; they see it practiced.

There is some good practice happening amongst these brothers, and there is some bad practicing that is happening amongst these brothers. That largely determines the character of those tribes and their futures. Jacob, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, brings all of these things out. That is why this fifth point that Dr. Fruchtenbaum makes is so interesting to me. It says,

*"Fifth, the future history of the tribes is viewed as an outgrowth of the present character of each son. The character of each son, to some degree, becomes the character of his tribe."*

It is not just about you and your decisions.

It is about how you and your decisions in the new year are going to affect those within your sphere of influence. Whether you want to see it or not—believe it or not—there are a lot of people that are watching your life. You have to understand that when you make a choice for God, or a choice against God, that it is impacting other people that are following you.

You say, "I do not have a church; I do not have a pulpit." Do you have a family? Do you have children? Do you have grandchildren? Do you have people that you work alongside? Do you have colleagues? Do you have people under you or over you in the organizational tree or chart where you work? There are more people watching your life and my life than we can possibly consider.

You have to understand that if you make a bad choice this year, you are negatively affecting a lot of people. The opposite is true: if you make some positive choices for God this year, then you are positively impacting people. These things are brought out by Jacob in these prophecies.

What we do here is we move into Genesis 49:3-27, where Jacob is now offering these prophecies. In many cases they are blessings on Jacob's Dozen—his twelve sons—who would become the progenitors of Israel's Twelve Tribes. Here is how we can divide that big section up Genesis 49:3-27, as he is dealing with these different tribes, but in a different order of their than their birth, as we have explained.

### III. Jacob's Blessings on His Sons (3-27)

- A. Reuben (2-4)
- B. Simeon & Lvi (5-7)
- C. Judah (8-12)
- D. Zebulun (13)
- E. Issachar (14-15)



- F. Dan (16-18)
- G. Gad (19)
- H. Asher (20)
- I. Naphtali (21)
- J. Joseph (22-26)
- K. Benjamin (27)

For Reuben, he does not finish well—I am not saying that Reuben was not saved because he was; but it affected his progeny. Simeon and Levi did not finish well (Genesis 49:5-7). Am I saying that Simeon and Levi were unsaved? No. What I am saying is that it affected their progeny. Things do not start getting more optimistic till we get to Judah in Genesis 49:8-12.

- A. Reuben (3-4)
  - 1. Position
  - 2. Power
  - 3. Loss

Notice Jacob's words to Reuben (Genesis 49:3-4). We see a position; we see power; and we see a loss. First of all, we see his position. If anybody was born with potential, it would be Reuben; but his life, for whatever reason, did not measure up to his potential. Why did Reuben have it all going for him? For one thing, in his position, he was the firstborn. You see that there in Genesis 49:3, where Jacob says,

*"Reuben, you are my first born."*

There is the family chart that we have been using regularly. From Jacob and Leah came the firstborn of Jacob, a child who became a man, named Reuben. Reuben, as the firstborn, possessed the rights of the firstborn, something that will be acquiesced—a right—through his behavior, as we will see; but when Reuben was born, talk about a guy with a silver spoon in his mouth—talk about a guy with ability. Potential. He should have measured up to something great, but tragically he did not.

Reuben was not only the firstborn, but he was also very strong. It says in Genesis 49:3, *"Reuben, you are my firstborn; My might..."* Apparently, this guy had a lot of natural ability. As Jacob's first, he was the beginning of Jacob's strength. You see that also in Genesis 49:3—*"...and the beginning of my strength."* Firstborn, natural ability, rights of the firstborn; what could possibly go wrong? We are going to discover that.

Reuben was also a man of power. It says, *"Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power."* So the whole verse says,

*"Reuben, you are my firstborn;  
My might and the beginning of my strength,  
Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power"* (Genesis 49:3).

The rights of the firstborn; natural strength of some kind; talent of some kind; yet his potential was unrealized. To me, as a Christian whose salvation is secure, that is one of the most troubling things to hear from the lips of the Savior at the Bema Seat Judgment.

I am not fearful of going to hell. (Once saved, always saved.).

What I am fearful of is standing before the Lord at the judgment seat of rewards, and the Lord essentially saying to me, "This is what I had planned for you, and yet this is where you ended up. I used your life and people were eternally blessed by it, but the truth of the matter is that I wanted to do so much more, and you just would not cooperate with Me in certain areas." That, to me, is a very troubling thing to hear from the Savior; that is not something I want to hear. Yet, this is something that was manifesting in the life of Reuben.

As you go down to Genesis 49:4, you see his loss. You see the cause of his loss; the curse he was put under as a result of his sin; and then the sin itself is described. Notice what Genesis 49:4 says of Reuben through Jacob's prophecies here:

*"Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence,  
Because you went up to your father's bed;  
Then you defiled it—he went up to my couch."*

What was the cause here? What was the problem? There was something in Reuben's character that made him unstable as water. Some of your Bible translations may say something like this: "boiling over as water." This was a man that was very talented. This was a man that was very gifted, but he did not have self-control. He did not rule his emotional life well. His emotional life rather ruled him or controlled him.

One of the things that the Holy Spirit seeks to build in the people of God is the Fruit of the Spirit. One of those aspects of the Fruit of the Spirit is self-control, where I am basically no longer impulse-driven—credit card wise, sexual temptation, whatever the issue is. The temptation comes and the temptation is very real, but I have the ability under the power of Jesus Christ to tell that temptation no.

You start doing that with regularity, and you start to discover that this is a character trait, that God is moving us in—this mindset of self-control. I do not have to have the last word in every conversation if I am a person of self-control. I do not have to follow the mantra, "Do not get mad, get even," if I am a person of self-control.

Galatians 5:22-23 says,

*"But the Fruit of the Spirit..."*

These are characteristics that cannot be generated through mere human ability. These are things God builds in us, and we submit to them by faith, moment by moment, as we learn to walk in His power.

*"But the Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,  
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; against such things there is no  
law."*

If these things are happening within me regularly, then I do not have to look at a set of laws on the outside to obey God. These things are being internally generated.

Second Peter 1:2-7 gives us the portrait of spiritual maturity. What is spiritual maturity? Is

it being able to check off the doctrinal list of things you understand? Is it the amount of time you spend reading your Bible and in prayer? Those things, by the way, are very important—doctrine is very important; but God never gave doctrine as the end game. Doctrine is supposed to transfer into how we live our lives.

How do I know if I am a person of spiritual maturity? Well, 2 Peter 1:5-7 explains it. It says,

*"Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge."*

There are things that I am doing—it is not the let go and let God mentality—situations are arising and pushing me into the area of a quick impulse reaction. God says, "I want you to handle this through My power, under My Spirit." You start walking like that regularly, and you are growing in terms of maturity. You may not know as much Bible as the person sitting next to you, but you are far more mature if you are walking in these things and the person sitting next to you is not.

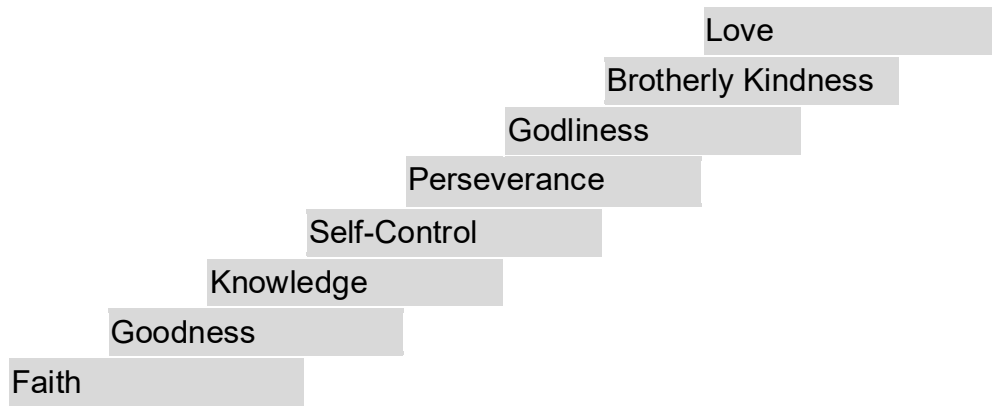
*"Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance..." (2 Peter 1:5-6).*

"Hupomene"—perseverance. I do not quit or throw in the towel at the slightest inconvenience. I am able to persevere in my job; I am able to persevere in my career; I am able to persevere as the leader of my family. It is amazing how fast people quit, but God does not want us to be quitters. He wants us to be people of "hupomene"—perseverance.

*"...and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love" (2 Peter 1:6-7).*

Here is what it looks like in terms of the portrait of growth. It looks like a staircase. You have faith, and then you build on faith, goodness. You do not say to yourself, "Good, good, good, good, good. I am going to be good today." You say, "Lord, what is goodness? How does it relate to this situation that I am in? What resources have You given me so that I can be a good person? Because I want to obey those and rely on those."

Portrait of Growth  
2 Peter 1:5-7



To your goodness add knowledge, and here it comes—the fourth one up—*"and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness."*

Kindness—that is the word "Philadelphia," from "phileo," brotherly love, and "adelphos," brothers. Philadelphia, City of Brotherly Love. Brotherly kindness and love, internal self-control, that was the very thing that Reuben was lacking. He was *"unstable as water," "boiling over as water"*—a lack of self-control.

How did that lack of self-control manifest itself? It manifested itself in the form of a curse, which you see in Genesis 49:4. It says,

*"...you shall not have preeminence."*

Something was taken away from him. What was taken away from him? The rights that he had as the firstborn. Jesus, hypothetically, could have come into the world through the Tribe of Reuben. That would have made sense, because Reuben is the firstborn; but because of his lack of self-control, he forfeited a privilege which could have been his. That is why Jesus came into the world, not through the firstborn, but the fourth born, through Judah (Genesis 49:10):

*"The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
Until Shiloh comes,  
And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples."*

A magnificent messianic prophecy. When the Messiah comes, He is coming from the Tribe of Judah. The way it should have read is as follows: "When the Messiah comes, He is coming into the world through the Tribe of Reuben." Reuben is the firstborn, but Reuben did something to acquiesce his privileges.

Now listen to me very carefully. Am I saying Reuben is unsaved and went to hell? I am not saying that, because when you study the millennial prophecies in Ezekiel 47, you see

all of these brothers represented. Reuben is in the Millennial Kingdom along with his progeny. He was saved, but he forfeited a privilege he could have had above and beyond salvation.

In Matthew 19:28, Jesus says this to the disciples,

*"And Jesus said to them, 'Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'"*

"You disciples that follow Me, guess what? When the Millennial Kingdom comes along, you are going to be sitting on twelve tribes judging Israel's twelve tribes." It does not say eleven tribes because Reuben is there. What did Reuben lose then? He did not lose salvation. What he lost was a privilege he could have had above and beyond salvation, in spite of the fact that on paper, this guy should have been an absolute winner with God.

Natural ability. Strength. Jacob says, "His strength is my strength." He is the firstborn. He had all the potential; he had it all going for him; yet, how did it end for him? With him not walking into the destiny that God had for him.

That is the tragedy of the carnal life of the Christian. It is not losing one's salvation and going to hell, but the tragedy is standing before Jesus and Him saying, "I wanted to do this, and you only allowed Me to do this, because you resisted Me. You were as unstable as water; like boiling over water—always getting angry, always getting upset with people, always having to have the last word—lack of impulse control. I just could not use you the way I wanted. Now enjoy eternity with Me, which will be a joy."

I am not trying to subtract from that, but there is this nagging regret: What could have been? Obviously, we cannot do anything to add to our salvation, but I can apply all diligence, as Peter said, to the walk of the Spirit, where I become what God has called me to become. I walk into my destiny; I fulfill the reason for which I was created and did not squander my Christian life on things that really, as far as God is concerned, do not have eternal value.

It is not just the Old Testament that warns us about this. It is the New Testament. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5:10 says,

*"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ..."*

In other words, this is mandatory. This judgment, as we have explained at this church and as you study it, is not a judgment to determine heaven or hell—that issue got fixed the moment you trusted in the Savior. This judgment is either to give or not give rewards. If I am understanding this judgment correctly (and it takes place, as I understand it, immediately following the Rapture of the church), then think about that for a minute. This doctrine of the Rapture of the church: any moment we could hear the trumpet and be summoned upward, to do what? To stand before the judgment seat of Christ, either to be given rewards or not given rewards based on how I spent my life and my time as a Christian.

We do not pass through a fire, but our works do to ascertain their quality. Apparently many people's works will pass through this fire, and they are nothing but wood, hay, and stubble—things we did for self-glory out of human power. They will go into the fire and they will be consumed; but then there are other works that are noncombustible. The only thing the fire can do is purify them. They are called gold, silver, and costly stones. You can read all of this yourself. It is in your Bible in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

I have actually stood in the very spot, the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ, in Corinth, where Paul used this as an analogy for us. Some works will pass through the fire. They are gold, silver, and costly stones. There are things we did for His glory, not our own; there are things we did through His power, not our own power. They will survive the fire, because the only thing the refining fire can do is purify the metal.

It cannot dissolve it. Unlike wood, hay, and stubble, which are all combustible, these are things that are noncombustible. The Bible says that whatever is left after the fire finishes its work is part of a reward that we will receive above and beyond salvation. We are not going through the fire, but our works do.

A lot of Christians say, "I do not care about this, I just want to be in heaven." I understand the sentiment, but my understanding of this is that Christians are given different crowns. There is, by my count, five crowns, and these are crowns that we have the ability to gain and cast at His feet, not once, because it is your crown, but whenever He is worshiped. That is what the Book of Revelation says. Whenever He is worshiped the twenty-four elders (who I think is a reference to the church), took their crowns and cast them at Christ's feet.

Now ask yourself this question: How frequently is Jesus going to be worshiped throughout eternity? I would think over and over again. Every time He is worshiped, here is your crown in your hand, or crowns; and you cast them at His feet, not to pay Him back (you cannot pay Him back), but an expression that God gives you to worship Him to a fuller extent.

Would it not be embarrassing when the time comes to worship Christ that everyone has a crown to cast at His feet and your hands are empty? These are things that the New Testament wants us to think about. I think about these things frequently when I am tempted back into the life of the flesh. I face the same issues and temptations you face. "No, Lord, I do not want to do that. I want to be fully rewarded, like one of the sisters there that took that expensive alabaster oil and began pouring it on Christ's head."

What did Jesus say of her? She who is forgiven much loves much (Luke 7:47). She was not trying to buy salvation or pay Him back; she just had something special that she used to glorify Jesus when He was here on the earth. I want that for myself for all eternity. I want that for you for all eternity. That is why this doctrine of crowns and rewards is very significant.

Paul warns here in 1 Corinthians 3:14-15,

*"If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.  
If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be*

*saved, yet so as through fire."*

He is still saved, because he is saved by grace; but there is a moment of regret—there is a loss that suffered. This is why the New Testament is focusing our attention on these rewards. Decisions that you are making now at a personal level are going to have a tremendous reverberating consequence, not only to people that are watching you and us, but in terms of this doctrine of rewards.

Reuben had potential. He should have finished well, and apparently he did not. What was his sin, exactly? You see it there at the end of Genesis 49:4,

*"...Because you went up to your father's bed;  
Then you defiled it—he went up to my couch."*

This is something that is described that Reuben did in Genesis 35:22. It says,

*"It came about while Israel was dwelling in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine, and Israel heard of it."*

I do not know if I understand every little detail of this sin, but I know this much about it: he traversed a sexual boundary. We would call that sexual immorality. I cannot tell you how many people I know (at one time I actually made a list of people, and I will never do that again, because it depressed me beyond belief), who were gifted and talented and had many, many things to offer and yet became disqualified in ministry simply because of sexual sin.

Billy Graham calls this the three G's for the minister. Number one, do not touch the gold (embezzlement). Number two, do not touch the girls. (sexual immorality). Number three, do not touch the glory—do not take for yourself adoration for something that God has done. If you watch people that fall in the ministry—you can change the dates and the facts around from person to person—it is always the same three things. I hear of a fallen minister and I say, "What was it this time? Was it the girls? Was it the gold? Or was it the glory? Or was it some combination thereof?

Reuben went into sexual immorality of some sort; he traversed a sexual boundary. Boy, are we living in a society right now where you can traverse boundaries constantly. All you have to do is turn on your TV or click on your phone. There are countless ways to move in inappropriate ways that other generations perhaps could not even contemplate—just double click, and there you are.

Hebrews 13:4 says,

*"Marriage is to be held in honor among all."*

God has a standard for marriage and sexuality. Do not get mad at me for articulating it, because I did not invent it—God did. Do not shoot the messenger.

*"Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4).*

It does not say "might judge." He says "will judge." What did Reuben do? He did something sexually here. Did Reuben go to hell? No. He is in the Millennial Kingdom, but the Messiah should have come from his line, not Judah's line. As I will show you next week, the same thing happened with Simeon and Levi. Levi's descendants did not do well because they had Levi genes. Maybe I will call the sermon next week "Levi Genes."

Let me leave you this quote here from Arnold Fruchtenbaum concerning Reuben. It says,

"The Tribe of Reuben never produced anyone of significance; it never produced a judge, a prophet, or a leader. His failure in leadership during the period of the Judges is brought out in Judges 5:15. He was overshadowed by Gad and overrun by Moab (II Kings 10:32-33; 1 Chron. 26:31-32). In the first census (Num. 1:20-21), he numbered 46,500; in the second census (Num. 26:5-7), he numbered 43,730, a decrease. The prayer of Moses in Deuteronomy 33:6 was: Let Reuben live, and not die; Nor let his men be few. Moses had to intercede to make sure Reuben did not disappear. Reuben played a minor role in Israel's subsequent history."<sup>6</sup>

(There are two censuses coming up in the Book of Numbers: one for the generation that came out of Egypt, and one for the second generation.)

Reuben should have played a major role, yet he did not. He did not finish well. These things are written for our instruction. The Bible will give you positive examples to follow and negative examples not to follow. Lord, I do not want to end up like Reuben. I do not want to be someone that is in heaven and smells the smoke on my garments. I want to be fully rewarded.

Let us pray. Father, help us to think these things out circumspectly, particularly as we are getting ready to live for You in 2025. I ask Father that if there is anybody here that does not know You personally, I pray that for them today would be the day of salvation. I pray that they would understand the gospel, meaning "good news."

Jesus, as we celebrated earlier, stepped out of eternity into time 2,000 years ago, to bridge a gap that we cannot bridge on our own. His final words on the cross were "*It is finished!*" (John 19:30). The only thing He asks us to do is to receive what He did for us as a free gift in His accomplishment 2,000 years ago. We know Lord, that 160 times the Bible teaches us how to receive this free gift, which is simply to believe. Another way of saying that is to trust in the work of the Savior.

We understand, Lord, that this is not a matter of joining a church or walking an aisle, giving money; but it is a matter of privacy between us and the Lord. For we come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, recognizing that we have a problem in terms of original sin that we cannot fix. Once we come under that conviction, we place our faith into the God-Man, Jesus, and His full transaction on the Cross—His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension.

---

<sup>6</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Genesis*, 636.