

# 4.14.2024 Sermon

## Wait a Second | Hebrews 11:21

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

jacob, joseph, sons, experience, god, ephram, blessing, israel, manasa, life, blessed, faith, love, worshiped, rachel, eulogy, lived, dying, father, today

### SPEAKERS

Elder Kevin Brisbin

Good morning. It is such a good morning, and I'm so excited to be with you this morning. I'm thrilled about the text I have for today. I was sharing with the elders that prayer before service. My prophetic hope for this morning is that we would all be like participants in a Color Run. Have you guys seen a Color Run? It's like a race, like a 5k.

And you know, some of you are excited about that, most of us are not. But the part of a Color Run is a lot of people just do it for fun because there are people on the sidelines throwing dyed cornstarch pouches. And it hits you in bursts, like in the pictures, which are always really dynamic, you know, with bright magenta, bright orange, and bright cyan, and all these vibrant colors. At the end of the race, the people are covered in this colorful dust.

That is my prayer for this morning. I pray that that would be the way we would experience the entrance of worship this morning, that the praise and worship, so we're all the ones, all of us, we're not on the sidelines, don't get the picture reversed. You're not the one throwing color at me. We're all in the race. We're in the tunnel. We're all the ones racing the race, in the worship and the sermon and the Scripture. Those are the things that are interacting with us. That's the spirit of God interacting with us and leaving its vibrant, colorful dust on us.

And so, my prayer is that by the end of this service, you'd be looking just like those people at the end of the race. And like taking pictures and all smiles and yeah, they're sweaty, but they're also covered in like, all these colors, from all the experiences they've had together. In that time. I've just really prayed for that this morning.

So, I mean, I pray you would enter in with me. Come along with me, come into this text with me, I am so excited to share it with you. I hope some of that rubs off on you like dust. I have so

much to share that I'm fighting the urge to just rush right into it like no introduction, just jump right into the text because it is so rich to me that I could go on for hours.

But I wanted to just take a minute to say, but the interpretation of Scripture itself is such a rich gift. I have one verse today, but I could talk about it with you for hours. Now if I were to restrict myself to just the text alone, I could share it with you in under eight seconds. "By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph and worshiped, leaning upon the top of his staff." I just did. But just as an obituary can't adequately capture the whole life of a person lived. So, a scripture without interpretation cannot adequately capture the fullness of an infinite God. It is an endlessly unfolding revelation.

I mean, how many of us have read a verse at one point in our life and been deeply impacted by it, but then read or heard that same verse, or verses years later, months later, years later, decades later, but then been deeply impacted by it again, but an entirely new way. And why is that? Well, in part, it's because we experience the text in the context of our experiences. And anyone alive knows the only constant in life is change. Our experiences are constantly changing with each new moment. And added to the experiences themselves are perceptions of our experiences and our reactions to those perceptions, all shape and reshape and reshape the way that we show up and move through the world. To put it simply, we grow. Hopefully, we learn new things. Even on a cellular level, we are in a constant state of change, of being remade, made anew and this undeniable experience of life can't help but shade the way that we interpret everything.

Your experience and your relationship with the church shades how you show up in this room today. Whether it is in alignment with the church with your past experiences, or in complete rebellious opposition to your experiences that you may have grown up with, your relationship with me shades how comfortable or uncomfortable you are right now. And your relationship with my previous sermons informs either how excited and open you are or how closed and guarded you are to hearing this one.

And I'm not here to condemn any of that. Your experience is your own. And I hope that you know, as James said, I do love you, and I do love God. And I love this place, and I earnestly seek after truth. And those are my sincere intentions that I do come to this sermon with, but I too bring my life and my experiences to this, and I openly acknowledge that. And as a church, we openly acknowledge that. That's one reason that we embrace a centered set theology. We come from all 360 degrees around this circle, this central idea of Jesus Christ, and His example of what it means to love God and love the world back to wholeness, the love of redemption, relationship, and reintegration. We were created from this place of love and are called to this place of love. But our journeys to pursue it are as varied as we are. Everyone's

path is different. And at Cornerstone, we acknowledge and we honor your path, your journey, to encourage you to continue your pursuit of that love of Jesus.

So yeah, I'm really excited to share my experience this morning with this text. And I encourage you to allow this to be just the beginning, just an entry point into your own experience with this text this week. I do hope I challenge you to think about it in new ways. I do hope that you are stirred by it. And I'm not here as an expert, but as a fellow co-journal. So, I accept the grace with which you give me. So, with all of that high context preface made, let's dive in. I invite you to settle into your seat and whatever way you'd like. You can lay back, you can sit on the edge of your seat. Just let the words wash over you as you take a little Sunday morning snooze, or journal your little hearts out. You do you, I'll do me.

So, Hebrews 11. In this chapter, we've been journeying with and looking at the way that they look back, to look to inform their present and look forward about how they're going to live their present, and looking back at all these people who lived and the way that they lived with a hope that lived looked beyond what they were living, and knowing that that informs our now. So that's where we're at, Hebrews 11. This is faith, the hall of faith, the faith of Abel, Enoch, Noah, the faith of Abraham, Sarai, Isaac, and then today, the faith of Jacob also called Israel. And because it only takes seven seconds, here it is again, "Hebrews 11:21: By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph and worshiped leaning upon the top of his staff."

And again, I'm going to do me, so that means it's time for Greek grammar school, a crash course for Christians. This, this Jacoba UPAF Misko pistes Jakob apothem, de SCO, by faith, Jacob, as he was dying, and that last word, a puff misco is actually two Greek words, a compound word, OPPO meaning from, of, or near, and fisco, meaning dead, like all the way.

So, Jacob has lived 147 years, and is now very near, close to being all the way dead. And this is the moment that he performs this act of faith, for which the author of Hebrew commends him, which for one shows, it's never too late to do something meaningful. You can be at death's door and still do that meaningful thing. And two, it's worth noting, he's not listed for the faith of working a second seven years after being deceived in order to win the love of his life. He's not listed for the faith of fathering the 12 tribes of Israel, not the faith of wrestling with God and receiving a new name, Israel, a name that then becomes the name of the entire Hebrew nation.

But this moment, which piques the interest by faith, as Jacob rounded third baseman, is going in for the slide. At home plate of life, he blessed both the sons of Joseph. This was his great act of faith, which at first is a little puzzling. I mean, wrestling with God or an angel and holding your own sounds pretty epic, as does fulfilling the prophecy to become the father of an entire nation, a name that endures millennia later, but this is the one, at least for the author of

Hebrews. And while my etymological study didn't shed any light on the why of that, and why this author chose this moment, something else did emerge for me in this etymological study.

So, the next Greek word. The Greek word for blessed is EULA gaio, by faith Jacob as he was dying, you log EO. And maybe, like me, you're thinking, huh, that word looks like eulogy. And we'd be right. It is. It is the Greek word you logo, is the etymological root for the modern-day word, eulogy. And what is the eulogy? Well, technically, it means praise or bless. But we all understand or interpret it to mean blessings or high praise, spoken over someone dead, about their life, about the kind of person they were and the things that they have accomplished in the past. And yet, here, the eulogy, is being given by Jacob as he was dying. The eulogy is being given by the one dying over the ones living. And before they had accomplished anything, anything other than being who they were, just being his children. Doesn't that preach?

And in this revelation, I hear the invitation to speak my eulogies over people, while they're still alive, to give them their flowers while they're yet living, and to bless them not for what they have done, or will do for me, but simply and purely for being, just being who you are. And this beautiful, symbolic meaning doesn't stop there. Like I said, seven second verse, but I could go on for hours. By faith, Jacob as he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph and worshiped leaning upon the top of his staff. Jacob eulogized each of the sons of Joseph. He blessed them both. But I'm going to ask you to put a pin in that one for now, with the promise that we will circle back to that particular part later. By faith Jacob as he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph and worshiped leaning on the top of his staff.

On the surface, two very simple phrases. Tygon is really, I mean, if you were reading the whole chapter of Hebrews in a single clip, I doubt we would any of us even notice those words, taken alone, leaning upon the top of his staff. Why might the author of Hebrews include this seemingly obscure detail? Well, what do we know about Jacob and the way that he walked? Yeah, he walked with a limp. According to the account in Genesis 32, this was a souvenir from when he wrestled with God and refused to let go without receiving a blessing. And he walked away with a limp and a new name, Israel, which means God perseveres. And the other seemingly simple phrase here, and worshiped. I mean, it's, it's even shorter and even easier to gloss right over. But what if we didn't? What if we pause right here and consider Jacob, in this moment, worshipping? The obvious question being why? Well, let's remember together. Yes, he may have been eulogizing his grandsons in this verse. But in these last few words of our verse for today, I hear an invitation for us to remember Jacob, a eulogy for Jacob if you will. As he lay dying, Joseph came to his father's bedside with his two sons, and Jacob worshipped. Take a moment and allow yourself to wonder, why do you think this particular scene prompted Jacob to worship?

And then let's remember this together. Remember, Jacob worked for seven years for the love of his life, only to be tricked and to have to work another seven years for her. Then after all of that, waiting, they wait some more, as Leah bears Reuben, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah. Rachel waits childless so she offers her servant Bilhah. She wants his beloved to bear and Dan and Naphtali, then watches again as Leah's servant Zilpah bears Gad and Asher, only for Leah to come out of retirement herself and have a little reunion tour again, bearing Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah, a girl after six boys. All as Rachel watched all this, Rachel waited. That's a lot of waiting. That's a lot of wanting to only ever be watching for Rachel.

Have you ever loved someone who's experiencing infertility? It's a rough journey. It's a deep hurting. I think it can be one of the deepest hurtings of the human existence. And no, it has been for those I've loved that have walked that path, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, month after month, year after year. All the while seeing the things you want most happening for what feels like everyone around you, just not happening for you. I can't imagine Rachel's pain. She watched her sister that she already shares with her husband, bear six sons and a daughter in her house. And whose secondhand the pain others see when they're wanting to be pregnant themselves but are not. And I mean, they get deep pain, even seeing someone pregnant at a grocery store, or on Facebook. Now imagine holding that deep desire and watching your sister bear children, with your husband, in your house. You can't even escape it. And then to watch even as their servants bear two sons each, all the while she remains loved, but barren. Can we take a moment and join Rachel there in her grief? Can we wait a second?

And while I trust that Jacob was excited about the addition of every single new life that came into his family, because I'm sure he was, as a father myself, I know that deep love I hold for every one of my children. But as someone who also loved another so much as to work 14 years to be reunited with them. It would be hard for me to imagine that he didn't also feel for Rachel, in her grief, and her pain, even alongside his own joy. And then, after all those years of waiting, all those years of watching it happen for everyone else, Rachel has Joseph. They literally named him increase, God shall add, because of how much joy and relief and release his birth added to their lives.

But this joy was short-lived. As Rachel went on to bear another son, Benjamin, but in bringing his life into the world, her life exited as she died in childbirth. She barely got to experience that thing that she had desired and wanted for so long. But our love doesn't die with our loved ones. You can see that hearts still up there, that was inside that stick figure. Rachel is not there, but their love still is.

Again, one of my favorite Marvel quotes, "What is grief, if not love persevering?" But where does it go? Well, take all of that love, all of that longing that would make a man work and wait

for 14 years to be married to the woman that he loves, and deposit it into Joseph. And we all know what happened from there. This great love Jacob had for Joseph was more than his brothers could bear. They sold him into slavery in Egypt and told their father that he was dead. It's believed that Joseph was 17 years old. How deep a loss. It's hard for me to grasp the gravity of grief for Jacob. In part, it's hard for any of us to really get there. Because we all know this story from the outside. Like we all know Joseph wasn't really dead. But we're journeying with Jacob today. So, put yourselves in the shoes of Jacob. He's just been told that the son that's one of the few remnants he has of the woman his deep love of his life, that they waited so long to have, is now one of the few things he has left has now joined the one he loves in death. It's also hard for us to do this because we know that Joseph is alive, and we even write off the years of slavery and imprisonment because we know the ending from the palace. We know the ending in the palace from the beginning of the betrayal. But for Jacob, this long-awaited son of his long-awaited love, just joined Rachel in death, at least as he is living this experience.

And we all know the story from there, slave, prison, palace, second in command to Pharaoh himself. Fast forward to famine, drought, and desperation, which bring Joseph's brothers from Canaan to Egypt. So, they come from Canaan, they arrive in Egypt to beg for food, the one place that still has food some 20 years later, two decades later, a reunion that they could not see, for Joseph had been dead so long in their own memories. They could not even see him living here in front of them, a trick and a test.

And then a repentance observed by one becomes a reunion made visible to them all. Which leads to Jacob coming to Egypt to be reunited with Joseph, back from the dead. I can't fathom the dividends of hope that must have been restored and deposited back into Jacob's heart on that day. So yes, Jacob worshiped. He worshiped that Joseph was there alive in front of them, that he was still alive to see Joseph alive and then to see the lives of Joseph's children, Manasseh and Ephraim, branches of a generational tree that he had believed had been cut off, here alive and budding. Let's look back at our source text for today, which is back in Genesis 48. It expands on this a little bit more. Sometime later, Joseph was told, "Your father is ill," so he took his two sons, Manasseh the eldest and Ephraim the second, along with him. When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to you," Israel rallied his strength and sat up on the bed. That's how close to death he was.

Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there, he blessed me and said to me, 'I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers. I will make you a community of people and I will give you this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.'" Now then, "Your two sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine, Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine." And did you catch that? Because it's easily passed over.

First, Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine just as Reuben and Simeon are mine. Jacob is adopting Joseph's sons as his own. This effectively gives Joseph a double inheritance because Joseph's first two sons will not split their father's inheritance, but rather each of them received their own portion directly from their new father and his inheritance. Secondly, Jacob has reversed their names. Remember, Manasseh is the eldest, but Jacob doesn't say them in that sign. Ephraim, he says Ephraim and Manasseh, and is the 12th of a child of any parent, I'm sure Joseph is probably used to his father mixing up their names. I mean, who isn't guilty. But Jacob goes on in verse nine. Then Israel said, "Bring them to me so I may bless them." Now Israel's eyes were failing. Again, he's at death's door. And because of old age, he could hardly see so Joseph brought his sons close to him, and his father kissed them and embraced them. Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face again. And now God has allowed me to see your children too."

And there it is, that glimpse that hints at all of that experience that Jacob had lived. Verse 12, then Joseph removed them from Israel's knees and bowed down with his face to the ground. And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right in Israel's left hand, and Manasseh on his left toward Israel's right hand, and brought them close to him. But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head. So, he was the younger and crossing his arms. He put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn, and then he blessed them. It actually says he blessed Joseph, but clearly through them.

Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May that God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully, the God who has been my Shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has delivered me from all harm. May He bless these boys. May they be called by my name, and the names of my father's Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly on the earth." When Joseph saw this, his father placing his right hand on Ephraim's head, he was displeased. He took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's to Manasseh's head and said, "No, my father, this is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, he too will become a people. And he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he and his descendants will become a group of nations." He blessed them that day and said, "In your name, will Israel pronounce this blessing? May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh." So, he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

Then Israel said to Joseph, "I'm about to die, but God will be with you, and take you back to the land of your fathers." And in verse 22, "And to you, I give one more ridge of land than to your brothers. The ridge I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow." And there's way too much here for me to unpack. But as a potential tie-in to last week, in the story of Jacob and Esau, I liked it this additional ridge of land Jacob gives to Joseph is the Hebrew word

Shechem, Shem, meaning shoulder, like a ridge, a mountain ridge. This same word Shechem also means portion, which could mean like a portion of an inheritance. And according to some Jewish traditions, this was also a play on words, and was the actual land of Shechem, capital S. And that is where Joseph's bones are carried when they leave Egypt, and that is where they bury the bones of Joseph. So maybe that tradition has some credence, it can be all of them. And what's interesting about the land of Shechem, it's significant as it was both the land where Abraham built an altar after God promised him the promised land. And it was the land where Jacob later built an altar, right after confronting his brother Esau, which we heard of in last week's text when they met up after the betrayal. So, this land of Shechem is a place that's marked by dreams and promise, and a place marked by brotherly reconciliation. And it's as if Jacob is saying, to my son, the dreamer, I leave the land of dreams. And I pray that you will live out your life there at peace with your brothers. Beautiful.

And then back to our source text, our source verse for today. Hebrews 11:21, "By faith, Jacob as he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph and worshiped, leaning upon the top of his staff." It's time to pull that pin out, the Hall of Faith moments, the blessings of Ephraim and Manasseh, when the time came for Jacob to pass on the blessing of his fathers to his children, he crosses his hands, and places his left hand on the eldest and his right hand on the second, and you should be shouting, "Now wait a second." And not just because that's the title of my sermon, but also because that's not the way of things; that's not how things are done. The eldest is to receive the blessing, by definition, his birthright, the blessing goes to the Firstborn. Except when Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel, which one brought the better sacrifice, the first or the second? And when Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, which inherited while the other was exiled, the second. Then Isaac goes on, and has two sons, Esau and Jacob, and which one received the blessing? When Joseph had two sons, while blessing both, which did Jacob bless above the other?

So, this idea may be countercultural, but it's also baked into the sauce of their national identity, woven into the very fibers from the beginning, transferred blessing. And why is that significant? Well, Pete Enns, who's a professor at Eastern University and host of a podcast, "The Bible for Normal People," and also the author of books "The Bible Tells Me So," "The Sin of Certainty," and "How the Bible Actually Works," has studied this much more extensively than I, or I could even probably do. So, I'll refer you to a post on his website, an article he's posted there, a podcast that he has on Genesis and large parts of his first book, specifically chapter three, "The Bible Tells Me So," all of which explore this in fairly great detail. And I'll post the links to all of those resources in the comments section of this video everywhere that it's posted.

But suffice it to say for today, this both aligns with and sets a precedent for Israel's national identity, both from the monarchy of kings, David, not a firstborn. And Solomon, not a firstborn to the national identity of Israel itself, who resides in the southern nation of Judah, not a



firstborn. And beyond that, the specific examples that were given today of Jacob blessing Ephraim and Manasseh isn't just an example of transferred blessing within the Jewish tradition. This is also the crux of Christianity itself. Pun intended, a son was believed to be dead. But he's alive. In his found seated at the right hand of Pharaoh, which is the place of the firstborn. And then the blessing, just as Jacob, Joseph's father, crossed his hands bestowing the birthright on the second. So, God, Jesus, his father, crosses his hands through the redemptive act of the cross, and bestows on us, us, the transferred blessing of Jesus. Through the cross, we too are adopted directly into the family of God, to God himself. And we receive the inheritance of Jesus, the firstborn Son of God, we are endowed with all the blessings and all the privileges of Jesus, as daughters and sons of God. And we receive this eulogy, this blessing, not because of what we've done, but because of who we are children of God. And God blesses each of us, and God worships, leaning upon the top of that good shepherd's staff. This is our transferred blessing from the God who crosses their arms and chooses to bless us, all of us. Amen.