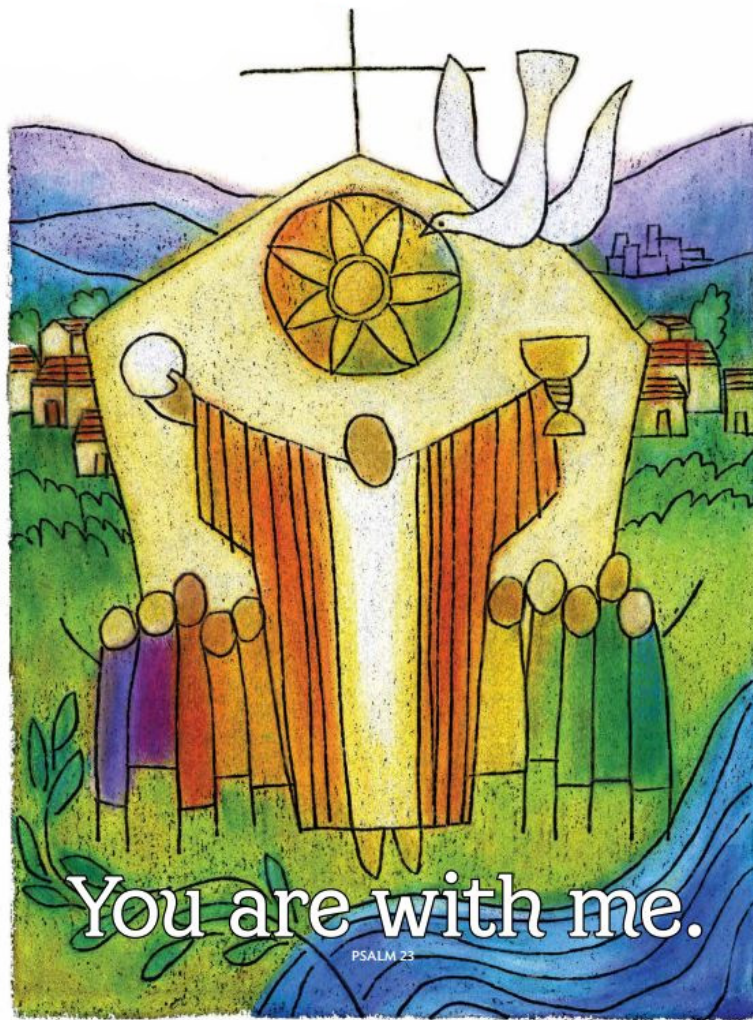


# Future Dreams

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



## Prayer of Illumination

Loving God, fountain of every blessing,  
Open to us your life-giving word,  
and fill us with your Holy Spirit  
so that living water may flow out of our hearts—  
a spring of hope for our thirsty souls and our thirsty world;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Introduction



Not long before my dad, Donald Tittle, died, he was able to have his wife (my mom), his daughters, sons-in-law, grandchildren, and me gather around in their home here in Tucson. It was a holy moment in the history of our family. My dad was able to gather his strength, and he sang, prayed, and blessed along with all of us. He read with an outstretched arm, as you see him pictured here, from his favorite Psalm,

Psalm 103:

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
And all that is within me,  
Bless his holy name!"*

My dad is my hero. He was my Jacob, and I his Joseph. His life, to the very end was a blessing, to his family, to his God. My dad taught me how to live and he taught me how to die. Though weak, he was strong. Though his body was failing, he was a giant in faith, filled with joy, gratitude, prayer, and blessing. Donald James Tittle finished well.

I want to be like my dad. I want to be that to my children, and Lord willing someday, to my grandchildren.

Jacob too was a practicing blessologist, and may we also be those who bless others all of our days that God gives us. Genesis opens with the creative power of the divine word, and now it closes with the inspired and prophetic words and blessings of Jacob.

Let's now conclude our series on Genesis with selected readings from:

**Scripture: Genesis 48, 49, selected verses (NRSVue)**

**Genesis 48: 1-4, 8-21**

After this Joseph was told, "Your father is ill." So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. <sup>2</sup>When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to you," he <sup>[a]</sup> summoned his strength and sat up in bed. <sup>3</sup>And Jacob said to Joseph, "God

Almighty<sup>[b]</sup> appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and he blessed me<sup>4</sup> and said to me, 'I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers; I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for a perpetual holding.'

<sup>8</sup> When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?" <sup>9</sup> Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them." <sup>10</sup> Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, and he could not see well. So Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. <sup>11</sup> Israel said to Joseph, "I did not expect to see your face, and here God has let me see your children also." <sup>12</sup> Then Joseph removed them from his father's knees,<sup>[c]</sup> and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. <sup>13</sup> Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right, and brought them near him. <sup>14</sup> But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the firstborn. <sup>15</sup> He blessed Joseph and said,

"The God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,<sup>16</sup> the angel who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the boys, and in them let my name be perpetuated and the name of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac, and let them grow into a multitude on the earth."

<sup>17</sup> When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, so he took his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. <sup>18</sup> Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father! Since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head." <sup>19</sup> But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations." <sup>20</sup> So he blessed them that day, saying,

"By you Israel will invoke blessings, saying,  
'God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.' "

So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh. <sup>21</sup> Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your ancestors."

### **Genesis 49: 1, 28-33**

<sup>1</sup> Then Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather around, that I may tell you what will happen to you in days to come..."

<sup>28</sup> All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, blessing each one of them with a suitable blessing.

<sup>29</sup> Then he charged them, saying to them, "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my ancestors in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, <sup>30</sup> in the cave in the

field at Machpelah, near Mamre, in the land of Canaan, in the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite as a burial site.<sup>31</sup> There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah.<sup>32</sup> The field and the cave that is in it were purchased from the Hittites.”<sup>33</sup> When Jacob ended his charge to his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed, breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

## SERMON – “Future Dreams”



*"And Jacob blessed Pharaoh"*

Blessing is one of the key themes in Genesis. Jacob was all about blessing. He sought blessings from his father and from the angel with whom he wrestled. He would not let go until he got the blessing. Now Jacob is the blesser. We read in the previous chapter when he arrived in Egypt, he blessed Pharaoh. He couldn't hold it in, blessing filled his cup and overflowed everywhere he went. He and his family lived in Egypt another seventeen years.

Jacob, who was ever alert, ever-planning, now got his affairs in order. He had Joseph swear that he would bring him to his ancestors' burial grounds in Canaan. We read for the first time in the Bible of illness, "Joseph was told his father was ill."

Now was the time for Jacob to bless his children and grandchildren. So Jacob summoned his strength to bless. Even in the midst of his grief for his beloved wife Rachel, who died giving birth to Benjamin, he still was filled with gratitude. How did Jacob manage this, through all of his sorrows?

Jacob was God-centered.

"God almighty appeared to me in Luz, after my dream of the angels ascending and descending from heaven."

Even though his eyes were dimmed with age, Jacob kept the VISION. He kept the faith. That's why Jacob made it into the great Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11.

"All of these died IN FAITH without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them."

There was no bitterness in Jacob, only hope.

"Walk by faith," says the Apostle Paul, "not by sight."

We read later in the great Hall of Faith chapter,

"By faith Jacob, when dying BLESSED each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the top of his staff." (Heb. 11: 21).

"Bring them to me that I may BLESS them."

Then Jacob kissed Joseph's sons, embraced them affectionately, and blessed them. He couldn't stop with his two grandsons, and so he blessed Joseph too. Even though Jacob thought Joseph was dead for twenty years, he's grateful, "I can see you after I thought you were dead and I can see your children." And he was filled with praise, "God my shepherd has given me protection, provision, and direction all my days. God, the Rock of Israel gives us power, sanctuary, and perseverance. The Angel of the Lord has redeemed me from all harm."

Jacob then blesses his grandsons, adopting them as his own children. This was officially done by asking their names and placing them on his knees. He gave the two grandsons the double inheritance due to the first born. Ephraim and Manasseh were now inducted into the twelve tribes of Israel.

Then old Jacob does something mysterious. He crosses his hands and blesses the youngest with right hand and the oldest with his left hand. Yet another theme in Genesis—the younger being blessed over the older. Both were blessed, but Ephraim had the special blessing.

*Why this reversal of seniority?* Was it because Jacob himself was the second born? Was it a way to honor Rachel's progeny that she never saw? But at the end of the day, this cross-armed blessing was a sign that God is free to act as he chooses. He is not bound to our human conventions, obligations, and assumptions. It really wasn't Jacob's choice anyway. God was doing the blessing here. Jacob was just the instrument. He had to do what God wanted to do.

God loves to choose the unlikely, the leftovers, and the left out to display his glory. And to this very day, when Jewish fathers bless their sons at the beginning of Sabbath, they repeat Joseph's blessing, "God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh."



So both grandsons are blessed. But it would be the tribe of younger Ephraim that would reach the greatest heights. Being blessed and being chosen at the end of the day is purely about grace. Paul says it best in Ephesians when he says,

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8-10)

However this surprising cross-armed blessing displeased Joseph, who staged everything for his oldest son to have the primary blessing. Yet Joseph relented to his father's insistence. He was an obedient son. In a reversal of his teenage dreams, Joseph bows in respect to his father Jacob.

And then Jacob says to Joseph,

"I am about to die, but God will be with you Joseph. He will bring you again to the land of your ancestors. You will not remain in Egypt forever."



*Jacob Blessing His Twelve Sons, Thomas Dalziel (1823-1906)*

After this, Jacob also spoke his final words over his sons, words of blessing, but also strong words of censure and praise. He was free to be honest because he was at peace. He knew he would be gathered to his people. And then, he "breathed his last."

"Though Jacob died, the promises of God did not."

For the ninth time Joseph weeps, this time falling upon his deceased father, kissing him. Jacob was embalmed and wept over for forty days by all, even the Egyptians. All the brothers, even some Egyptians, travelled with Jacob's remains to honor their father's wishes. He was buried with his ancestors.

Joseph too would grow old. He, like his father, when nearing death blessed his children and grandchildren on his knees. He spoke kindly to his brothers,

"I am about to die and God will surely come to you my brothers and bring you up out of this land."

He too kept the vision and the faith like his father. "When God comes, bring my remains to the Land of Promise." And Joseph breathed his last. Like his father, he was embalmed, but he was placed in a coffin in Egypt. Israel stays in Egypt, and they eventually become slaves to Egypt, as we hear in Exodus. And over four centuries later, at the Exodus, Moses and the Israelites brought Joseph home to his ancestors. The circle remains unbroken.

Hear the good news Immanuel: God is still coming, still delivering, still bringing exodus to our exiles. We too will arrive safely to our everlasting home. Indeed, we are blessed, for in life and in death, we belong to God.

Amen.

Sermon Art: "*Body of Christ*" by J. Lonneman, <https://specialofferings.pcusa.org/resource/2023-pgw-poster/>

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