

00-08-06a

Let's begin our worship this morning with a moment of prayer. Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you for the privilege we have to assemble when and where we choose.

We thank you that we are free to pursue knowledge of you, to pursue living our life in the light of the Word and of exercising faith in freedom and in safety. We thank you for the fact that we even have that opportunity, that the Lord Jesus Christ, in love, came down and offered Himself as a sacrifice on our behalf, endured not only the anguish and the suffering involved in His crucifixion, but also in bearing our sins, the sins of the whole world, made it possible for us to have a fresh start, to have new life, and to have eternal life in your presence. We thank you for the opportunity we have this morning to nourish our souls, to be fed and instructed in your Word.

We thank you that each of us is gifted and enabled by the Holy Spirit to be a blessing to others. We pray that our fellowship this morning will be glorifying to you and pleasing in your sight. We pray that we will be able to set aside the pitfalls of our nature and live in the power that is in our souls because of the presence of your Spirit and the presence of your Word.

We ask your blessing on us as we study together and worship together. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enlighten us, give us perception and understanding, and also the ability to remember and apply and practice the things that we learned this morning. For we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. For our scripture reading this morning, turn with me to Psalm 94. Psalm 94.

Many times in the Psalms we find the psalmist, whether it's David or one of the other authors, in some sort of extremis. It seems as though they are surrounded by enemies or hemmed in on every side. There are those who seek his life and want to bring him down to the pit.

Many of the Psalms are a personal appeal for deliverance. That doesn't immediately seem pertinent as we continue our study in Genesis 49 of the blessing that Jacob pronounces on his sons, the oracle that he delivers. Some of them seem to be more of a blessing than others.

But he predicts the future of each of the tribes that will descend from his 12 sons. And yet there is a very prominent relationship of the content of this Psalm and the others like it to what we're going to study this morning. And we'll see that when we get back to Genesis.

But this Psalm, Psalm 94 in the New King James, is titled, God, the Refuge of the

Righteous. The thing about a refuge is it's like when many of us were, I guess all of us were younger back 30 years ago, 40 years ago. If you remember in the late 50s and early 60s with the threat of nuclear holocaust uppermost in a lot of people's minds when they thought about the world situation, there was a flurry of digging and building for bomb shelters.

And there was hardly a neighborhood where you didn't see at least one, if not several, bomb shelters in the backyard. And this was a place of refuge. This was a place of safety.

In Oklahoma, people have storm cellars. That's just what they're called, storm cellar, even though they're used for lots of other things, storing fresh vegetables and so on. But the reason it's a storm cellar, that's where you go in tornado season when it looks like something dangerous is approaching.

It's a place of refuge. Just having a place of refuge that you know you can go to, even when you're not in it, gives you a sense of comfort and a sense of security. People don't rush out and buy those in the middle of a storm or in the middle of a war with another country.

It's something you construct and take your confidence from possessing, even in times of peace and in times where there's not a threat. You know that you have a recourse. You have a place you can go to.

And the sad thing would be to have something like that, and yet when the storm comes or when the adversity hits, to not avail yourself of it. You've built it. You have it there.

You know it's available. And yet in the panic of the moment, you forget to go there. And there have been cases in Oklahoma, for example, where people had a perfectly good storm cellar or had a place where they could have gone, but they didn't properly assess the danger and they were blown away, literally, when all they had to do was go down into the basement, and they just didn't.

There are other people, of course, who are optimists and live in mobile homes and don't choose to leave when there are tornado watches and tornado warnings and perish along with their stuff. There's nothing more that leaves a stronger impression than going, as I have done several times. There was a tornado that struck Claremore when I was a teenager, and I actually had to spend the night in town.

I'd been in Claremore working as a scorekeeper for Little League Baseball, and they called the game because this storm blew in, and it came in so quickly that I could not even drive home. It was only 12 miles home, but I couldn't get there. I had to go stay with friends, and a tornado came over Claremore that night and devastated a mobile home park just a few blocks from where I was staying.

We went out the next morning and looked at it, and the tie-downs were in place and the cinder blocks were underneath the floor of the mobile homes, but everything from the floor up was gone. They looked like flatbed trucks, and it just literally tore the walls, the roof, and everything between the floor and the ceiling away. They were clean.

It looked like a little platform where you would have an auction or have a band come up and play. There was just nothing there. Even the carpeting had been torn away from the plywood or the particle board.

So having a place of refuge, there are a lot of different components of that. Not only do you need to have one and know where it is and what it's for, but when the storm hits, you need to be in it and to avail yourself of it. And God as the refuge of the righteous is the subject of this psalm.

O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs. Isn't that an unusual way to begin a psalm? The very first line says, You are the one to whom vengeance belongs. And you think when you're talking about a situation or a circumstance where refuge is needed, it's usually because there is an attack, there is a threat of some sort.

But the very first thought in the psalmist's mind is, Vengeance, going out and recompensing and getting satisfaction against whoever has caused this threat, is not an option. It is God to whom vengeance belongs. And he mentions this twice.

He repeats it. O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs. O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth.

Rise up, O judge of the earth. Render punishment to the proud. Lord, how long will the wicked, how long will the wicked triumph? They utter speech and speak insolent things.

All the workers of iniquity boast in themselves. They break in pieces your people, O Lord, and afflict your heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger and murder the fatherless.

Yet they say, the Lord does not see, nor does the God of Jacob understand. Understand, you senseless among the people, and you fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, shall he not hear? He who formed the eye, shall he not see? He who instructs the nations, shall he not correct? He who teaches man knowledge, the Lord knows the thoughts of a man, that they are futile. Blessed is the man whom you instruct, O Lord, and teach out of your law.

That you may give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit is dug for the wicked. For the Lord will not cast off his people, nor will he forsake his inheritance. But judgment will return to righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it.

Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? Who will stand up for me against the

workers of iniquity? Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence. If I say, my foot slips, your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up. In the multitude of my anxieties within me, your comforts delight my soul.

Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, have fellowship with you? They gather together against the life of the righteous, and condemn innocent blood. But the Lord has been my defense, and my God the rock of my refuge. He has brought on them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness.

The Lord our God shall cut them off. Out of many points that you can make from this psalm, I would direct your attention particularly to verse 17 and following. Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence.

If I say, my foot slips, your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up. In the multitude of my anxieties within me, your comforts delight my soul. There's a circumstance where there's oppression from the outside.

There is attack and threat from outside. But the first place for comfort and response is on the inside. When a circumstance assails us, and sometimes these don't always have to be present.

They can be in the past. This can be something, just the memory of it comes up and troubles our soul. The threat of it, the possibility it happened once, it might happen again.

It's just as real as if there were a tangible threat. What is our attitude? What is our recovery response? We go to the Lord. Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence.

Would have fallen to the ground like a leaf. If I say, my foot slips, this is an appeal to the Lord. Lord, my foot is slipping.

I don't have solid ground to stand on here. I don't have stability. I don't have a stable situation.

Your mercy, oh Lord, will hold me up. This is a statement of faith. God's mercy will stabilize us when we don't have anything to stand on.

When we don't have the strength or the opportunity to stabilize ourselves, God's mercy will. In the multitude of my anxieties within me, your comforts delight my soul. So even before the resolution of whatever the circumstance may be on the outside, we need stability on the inside, and it comes from God.

Look at verse 20. Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, have fellowship with you? This is prominent. We're in an election year.

There's lots of talk about the platform of the different parties and the position of the candidates on various issues that seem to involve morality. And we see that a lot of times iniquity seems to be subsidized and even encouraged by the laws that are granted. They've started to try to legitimize homosexual relationships in different states of the union and areas of the country where law is fostering iniquity and supporting it.

And in some cases, law seems to work against those who are trying to do the right thing. Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, have fellowship with you? Your first reaction might be, well, we need to change that law. We need to depose or overthrow that authority.

We need to get those people out of office and get someone else in. The answer is to change the government or change the law. But the psalmist's attitude is, well, the ones who do this don't have fellowship with God.

They don't have a relationship with God. They're not going to be sustained. They're not going to be blessed.

They're not going to benefit. And this is an eternal perspective. This is looking at things from a higher point of view than just the immediate consequence.

Because that throne of iniquity that devises evil by law does not have fellowship. The implied answer to this question is no, they don't. And that's the seal of their doom.

If they don't have a relationship with God, nothing they do will last. Nothing they form is going to prosper. They gather together against the life of the righteous and condemn innocent blood.

The idea here, and of course in poetry you have a lot packed into a few phrases, but when it says they condemn innocent blood, this means that the law is actually being used against the innocent. And in some cases it results in the death penalty. They're actually executing innocent people.

They are condemning and bringing the penalty of the law to bear against those who really have no fault. The law itself is evil. And of course this is the extreme case.

Below the extreme case, this is an a priori argument in the sense that if you have, or actually it's probably an a priori argument, but if you have this thing happening where people are even suffering death because of evil laws, everything less than that is also happening, probably to an even greater extent. What is the answer? Overthrow the government, rise up in rebellion and so on? The Lord has been my defense and my God is the rock of my refuge. He has brought on them their own iniquity and shall cut them off in their own wickedness.

He has already seen and has already judged. Their iniquity rests on their head. They

stand condemned even while they hold office, even while they continue to perpetuate this evil.

He has brought on them their own iniquity and shall cut them off in their own wickedness. The Lord our God shall cut them off. But we know, even the scriptures acknowledge in other places, that this doesn't always happen in time.

There are people who, you look at how long they've been trying to get rid of Castro down in Cuba. And you think, well, here's a regime that's foisting communism and poverty on its people and the oppression. That seems to be a one-way border.

People jump in boats and try to flee. You don't see people in Florida getting in boats trying to go to Cuba. It's oppressive.

It's a bad deal. It's economically unsound. The laws down there are evil.

He's a throne of iniquity, devising evil by law, perpetuating evil. One of the last communist dictatorships in the world. And he's been there for 40 years that I know of.

And how come God hasn't cut him off? Where's the justice? Where's the vengeance? Well, the psalmist is looking at this from an eternal perspective. It doesn't matter so much whether there is vindication in this life. Because there is certain vindication in the next.

Where do you think Castro and those like him are going to be eternally? They may have their plant bloom for a season here on earth. But however long they last. He could last another 10 or 20 years down there until he dies and never be removed from office.

But all he's doing is multiplying evil. And when he stands before God at the judgment day, there are eternal consequences. And this time on earth is going to seem a drop in the bucket.

And those who have been oppressed, believers in particular, the righteous who have been gathered against, their lives have been gathered against them. Verse 21, their blood that has been condemned, there is going to be a far greater recompense than could ever be. It wouldn't matter what you did for someone in this life.

It's what God is going to do in the next that is going to count and is going to last. But to be comforted by this and to have assurance and confidence, we have to have an attitude and a perspective that treats eternal things as real and as more real than what's happening in this life. How can you be comforted when you see relatives or you see those close to you and even yourself come under persecution and affliction by those in authority? We tend to think in terms of governments and kings and thrones, but this also pertains in smaller contexts.

There are little mobocracies in social life. There are despots in employment situations. There are people who use whatever authority they have that we're under to persecute and to afflict.

And the same principles apply. People who hold authority have responsibility and they have accountability, and it goes way beyond this life. It is visible to God and there is a reckoning.

There is a day of judgment. And whatever success they have or may seem to have in this life will pale in comparison to their accountability before God. It doesn't say that God is always going to deliver the innocent and deliver their blood.

There are times when they will suffer and they will be executed. Look at John the Baptist. Look at the roll call of the prophets and the faithful in Hebrews 11 who were persecuted, lived in caves and holes in the ground, who were sawed asunder and all of the terrible fates.

You can look at people who have been martyred for their faith all down through the ages. And where was their deliverance? Where was their recompense? Where was the vengeance of God? If we have hope in this life only, we are of all men most miserable, Paul says, when he's talking about the resurrection over in Corinthians. And he says, if you're only hoping for everything to be resolved in this life, you're going to be the most miserable of men.

We have to learn to look beyond the immediate. We have to learn to look beyond the temporal or the mundane, the things that pertain to this life. This is a part of our hope.

We know that triad of Christian virtues, faith, hope, and love. Hope is the eternal perspective. It is the knowledge and the surety that whatever things may look like now, it has to be put in the context of the future with God.

And that is not only on the vengeance and the recompense side, but also on the opportunity and the hope side. The fruit that we bear, one of the most common misconceptions in Christianity today is that your fruit is what you can see in this life. People whose lives are impacted, quote-unquote, by your ministry or the function of your spiritual gift that you should be able to point to and see.

There have been people that even argue that if there's not visible fruit in someone's life, if you can't see lives that have been changed and people that have come to Christ through evangelistic effort and so forth, that that person may not even be saved. That there has to be visible fruit as a confirmation under the heading of perseverance of the saints. A genuine saint will bear fruit because God is at work in them to will and to do his good purpose.

And people will call your salvation into question if they don't see you out there laboring

in the fields, their white for harvest, so to speak. And it's a terrible misconception, and it is short-sighted. It completely denies the role of hope.

It completely betrays a lack of spiritual eyesight and spiritual vision because it is the Father who sees in secret. It is the invisible fruit. It's the daily victories.

It's the victories that are not in the flesh-and-blood arena, but with principalities and powers and rulers in high places. It is the victory of our faith that is more often than not invisible that accomplishes God's purpose and fulfills God's plan. And that's where we pursue our calling.

It is in the solitude of our own souls. It is in the fellowship we have with believers of like mind who understand the importance of what God sees and what God has called us to. God has called us to holiness.

God has called us to live by faith. And five different people can perform the same act. I used to use the, particularly in a large church setting where there's a tradition of passing the offering plate.

I would never start that tradition, but it is difficult to stop it in a place where it has been of longstanding. And so being flexible enough to permit that tradition to continue, I regularly pointed out the fact that it is not the money that is placed in the plate. Anyone can pull out a folding bill and place it in the offering plate.

It is not the act of giving. It is the thinking behind that act that counts. You could have five different people all pull out a \$20 bill and drop it in the plate.

But one of them does it because he's aware of who's sitting on each side of him in the pews. And as the plate comes by, he doesn't want them to notice the fact that he doesn't drop something in the plate. Back a hundred years ago, people used to tease because people would actually drop buttons and things in the plate so there would be a clinking sound.

They didn't want to put any money in. They figured, well, nobody's going to know when they look in the plate and see these buttons. All the people next to me will know I put something in the plate and they won't know that it wasn't real money.

And they used to regularly find buttons and things in the offering plate because people did not want to be thought to not be giving. And they could rationalize it in their mind and say, well, I gave last Sunday, but I just don't want people to think I'm not giving. So they dropped these buttons in the plate.

And so there's one motivation. I don't want to be ill thought of or thought to be deficient as a Christian. A second person might say, well, I want to set a good example.

I know people are watching me and I'll do it for the example. I don't want to be a bad example. And for the sake of these people that I'm trying to bring, here's this person I've invited to church and I've been praying with them and trying to get them to be a good Christian just like I am.

I'll model good behavior for them. I really don't want to give, but I'll give so that they'll give. And so you have that motivation.

You have a third person. The plate comes by and they put it in because they figure, well, I had a really bad week. I was disobedient.

I committed a lot of sins. But I'll make up for it. I'll kind of even the scale.

I'll try to let some of my good deeds weigh in and balance my bad deeds this past week when I was cheating and scandalizing and doing this, that, and the other. Well, I'll put a big chunk of the plate and God will say, well, he's not all that bad. And you can think of all of these different motivations.

The act itself is what is apparent to human eyes. And the pastor, I've made it a point to never even look out at the congregation. I would open up my Bible and review my notes or something, and I never, ever looked at the congregation while the plate was being passed.

I don't want anybody to get the idea that, well, I need to do this because the pastor's watching. What's he going to think if I just hand the plate on? Why we do what we do is only visible to God. He is the one that knows the thoughts.

The psalmist points that out here. He is the one who knows the hearts. Verse 8-11, Understand, you senseless among the people, and you fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, shall he not hear? He who formed the eye, shall he not see? He who instructs the nations, shall he not correct? He who teaches man knowledge? The Lord knows the thoughts of man.

And he knows when they are futile. He knows the thinking behind our actions. This is the very definition and essence of hypocrisy, to put a front on things where you look good to others, but your heart is not in it.

And our life and the fruit of our life is in the invisible realm. That's where it is measured. And to understand that and to remember it day by day is where our eternal perspective, our hope, comes in.

It is God who sees. It is God who judges. We don't live to please other people.

In many cases, what people see, especially if you don't make any attempt to put up a front, there's going to be a looking askance. There's going to be a frowning of the brow

and a whispering in times when you're not there, about, oh, you know, so and so, they don't do this, and they don't do that. And I never see them do thus and so.

You have to be willing to brave that and let God judge. I remember David standing on the hilltop above Saul and Abner when they awakened to find that David has been in their camp and has taken Saul's water bottle. And he's standing up there, and he says, Look, I could have killed you in your sleep.

The Lord judge between me and thee. We'll see who's righteous on judgment day. I have not lifted up my hand to take your life the way you have lifted up your hand and your kingly authority to take mine.

The Lord judge between me and thee. And any time you find yourself in that, our first instinct, nobody likes to be disapproved. Nobody likes to be ill thought of.

But when we find ourselves in that position, we have to remember the Lord judge between me and thee. We'll see who has gotten an understanding of what God's plan and purpose is all about on judgment day. And we have the confidence that God knows, God sees, and the one who sees in secret will reward openly on that day.

The Lord is not unrighteous to forget our work of faith, our labor of love, our prayer, our consistency in the little things. He who is faithful in those which are least, one day God will entrust us with great things because we have learned to be faithful in small things, things that are invisible to the eye of man. But there is a responsibility, and the other great theme in this psalm is that rulers and leadership are accountable.

And this is looking up at the leaders who are over, but you remember that leadership, people who are in authority, and all of us have authority of some form or another, maybe in a small area. But we're accountable for that, how we exercise it. God will judge.

He's the one who formed the ear, and He hears. He's the one who invented the eye, and He sees, and He knows the thoughts of the heart. And we are accountable when we exercise authority and responsibility before the Lord.

He sees every moment, every circumstance. And just as He will bring their iniquity on their own heads, these evil rulers, and will cut them off in their wickedness, to the extent that we allow evil or sin to creep into our exercise of authority, we will fall into that same condemnation. Let's turn back now to Genesis 49.

I'm anxious to resume. In the oracle that Jacob delivers under the inspiration of God to his 12 sons, you remember the introduction where he calls them together so that he can tell them what shall befall them in the last days. This isn't in the next few days.

This is their progeny, their offspring, the fate of their descendants, the tribes that will be called by their name. I'm going to tell you what shall befall you in the last days. Gather

together in here, you sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel, your father.

Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellence of dignity and the excellence of power. Unstable or frothy as water, you shall not excel because you went up to your father's bed, and then you defiled it. He went up to my couch, Jacob says.

The thing we recall about this is that although Jacob is talking about what will happen in the last days, he ties that back to what happened in previous days. The fate of Reuben's descendants is tied to Reuben's past actions and the kind of man that Reuben is. Reuben is a symbol or a representative of the trends and the areas of strength and weakness that are going to pertain and be prominent in his descendants.

So you think, well, this 15th generation Reubenite down there living in the land of Canaan is going to be laboring under this almost curse that came from Jacob because great-great-great-great-granddad went in and slept with a concubine, so now I'm hemmed in. I'm never going to excel. It's all Reuben's fault.

And we touched on this last time that circumstances are not determinative of fate. There are going to be some great people in Israel from all of these tribes. There are going to be men who are heroes of the faith from every one of these tribes.

And many of them are recorded in Scripture. You can document the fact that here's a great-great man in Israel and you look at the tribal prediction back here and you think, well, he had no possibility of becoming great. Look at this curse that was on him.

These are symbolic. They are representative. They are trends and patterns that are going to pertain for a collective group of individuals, which are these tribes.

But they are not determinative. They are not a predestination for every single individual in the tribe because disadvantages can be turned to advantages. And those things that seem like they are most a liability wind up being assets.

We talked about this last time about people that have overcome physical handicaps to excel and surpass everyone else in a particular field, whether it's running or some other field of athletics. Some of the greatest athletes have overcome handicaps and adversities. Those things can be turned from cursing to blessing for people of faith, for people who persevere.

And in the spiritual realm, it is doubly so. So the question is then, why are these even mentioned if it's really up to everyone's volition and their level of faith as to what they become? Then why do we have these predictions? Why does God predict and give this oracle for the different tribes? This is one of the earliest opportunities to reflect and to communicate God's attitude toward different kinds of failure as well as different kinds of success. The blessing that Jacob pronounces on Joseph and his two sons, the oracles that

Jacob delivers for his twelve sons.

You think about this. This book was first delivered to Israel. This was the first book of the law.

They didn't have the whole law of Moses. They didn't have all of the later illustrations in history that we have in the historical books and the prophetic books and even more so in the New Testament to tell them what God's attitude was. How severe an infraction is it to violate the established rules in a family and the authority of a father? Well, here Israel begins to find out.

This is Genesis, the book of beginnings. These are the earliest revelations of God's attitude. God says, Do you want to know how severe it is to go up to your father's couch? The firstborn son is going to lose his inheritance.

Which is stronger, the tradition of marriage or the tradition of primogeniture? Well, guess what? It's marriage. Even if it's a polygamous marriage, that marriage supersedes and is more important than primogeniture. And when they come into conflict, which one prevails? It's marriage.

Reuben violated the marriage bed of his father and he lost his inheritance. He lost all of it. He will not excel.

He doesn't get the double portion. He doesn't get the rulership. He doesn't get the family priesthood.

He doesn't get any of it because of this one act of disobedience, this act that subverted the authority of his father and violated the sanctity of his marriage bed. And it's a concubine. And you think, Well, maybe there's an out here.

Maybe he's got a plea. Maybe he can appeal because it wasn't Leah and it wasn't Rachel. It wasn't his true mother.

It was just a concubine. But the principle is anyone with whom Jacob sleeps and certainly anyone with whom he has offspring is united with him and is treated as a wife for legal purposes. And Reuben violated that.

And of course, this was an act of hubris. This was an act of Reuben trying to take hold. It was not uncommon in the ancient world.

This is the reason Absalom is going to take his father's concubines. When he drives David out of Jerusalem, he takes the concubines and sleeps with them and he does it on the roof of the palace. Why? Is he just a hedonist and an exhibitionist? No, he's showing Israel that he has taken the things of his father unto himself, that he is taking everything, the authority, the rulership, all of the things of his father.

It's a symbolic act. And Reuben, I don't think... There were probably many younger women that he could have gone and fornicated with or committed adultery with. But he does it with Bilhah because this is a symbolic act that as the firstborn son, he's taking the reins of the family and taking the things that belong to his father and his father is still alive.

And so, because of that, what is God's attitude toward that? How sanctified is the marriage bed? How sanctified is the authority of the father in the household, which Reuben, by this act, is subverting and seeking to take to himself? Well, it's very severe. Reuben's going to lose everything. And this oracle says his descendants are going to pay the price.

The tribe of Reuben is not going to be prominent in Israel. There's not going to be rulership or double portion or great blessing for his descendants. Does it mean that the individuals in that tribe are never going to be blessed or never have prosperity and so on? No.

It means that the tribe as a group is not going to be prominent in Israel. It's a symbolic discipline and it reflects God's attitude. It teaches a lot.

People say, wow, boy, it really came down with both feet on Reuben. It's going to make him think twice before someone tries that again. And so we reviewed that in some detail last time.

We want to come forward now and take a look at the next two brothers, Simeon and Levi. Again, we began this last time. Instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place, this is how it's translated here in the New King James.

Let not my soul enter their council. Let not my honor be united to their assembly. For in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they hamstrung an ox.

And we saw last time a better translation of this is that in their self-will they uprooted a wall. Because you go from a lesser to a greater. Slaying a man is pretty bad.

But hamstringing an ox is pale by comparison, although animal rights activists might see them as equal. In their anger they slew a man. That's one man's fate.

But when they uproot a wall, the wall affects the whole community. It affects the communities on both sides of the wall. And by tearing that apart and destroying the relationship between them, this affects many, many people.

And it is their anger and their self-will that does that. And we're going to see something very fascinating before we continue this morning to talk about Judah, who gets five verses to his prediction. But I want to revisit three things about these three brothers that we've looked at, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, that relates to their names.

And the thing that we recall out of this is that we can make mistakes in our lives. We can alter the course of our lives by the mistakes that we make. And there are circumstances that will not change.

Probably the most prominent example of this would be people who maybe commit a murder or some other heinous crime and wind up going to prison. They come to Christ in prison in a genuine way, and yet it doesn't get them out of prison. There was a lady, I don't know if she actually was a believer or not, but she professed to have come to Christ and seemed to have a lot of spiritual activity in her life going on, but she still got executed.

And it may not change the circumstances to come to Christ or return to God and His plan, but that cursing can be turned to blessing. And those circumstances that seem to be so bad can actually be a place where we bear a lot of fruit. So rather than crying the blues about what has happened in the past, we recognize the principle that when we come to God by faith, when we claim His promises, when we avail ourselves of His power, what may have started out as disadvantages become advantages.

And what may have started out as discipline or as liability or as self-induced misery can become that which produces the greatest areas of strength in our soul. The thing to focus on is not our failure. It's not the failure of others.

It's not the unjust authority that's inflicted on us from the outside. It is the response. It is the power of God that comes into our souls in those circumstances that is the issue.

Are we going to put our eyes on man? Are we going to put our eyes on ourselves? Or are we going to keep our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith? He's the ultimate example. He was unjustly accused. He was falsely convicted.

He was wrongly executed. And yet, in this series of injustices, God wrought the greatest victory in human history. God can take the disadvantages and the injustices and the failures and the sin and the evil of man and turn it into good, turn it into victory, turn it into triumph.

The key is where are we in the picture? Are we people of faith? Or are we people who have lost sight of our calling? And that's the question we each have to ask ourselves and ask it frequently to check ourselves and see if we're in the faith. If we're in the faith, there is nothing too hard for God. There's nothing impossible.

There's nothing that He cannot do. It really depends on what we decide. Let's pause and take our break because I want to get rolling on the rest of Jacob's blessing.