



Hidden away in the some of the most tedious books of the Bible, among myriads of unpronounceable names, lies one of the most remarkable stories of fatherhood ever told.

His name was Asher. He was the eighth son of Jacob, born in Paddan Aram, which today is Northern Syria (Gen. 35:26). Remember Jacob had two wives, Leah and Rachel. At different times, when they struggled with infertility, both of them gave their handmaids to Jacob. Asher was born from Leah's handmaid, Zilpah. He had an older brother named Gad. At Asher's birth, Leah said, *"Happy I am! For the women will call me happy! So she named him Asher"* (Gen. 30:12). Asher means "happy" in Hebrew. So Happy Gilmore wasn't the first to be called Happy!

Asher's Inauspicious Start

But when you look at the way he started out, I'm not sure how happy he was. He wasn't born from Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel. He wasn't even born from Leah, but from one of her handmaids. Asher didn't have the honor of being the oldest son like Reuben, nor was he the strongest son; that would have been Judah. He wasn't the doted on youngest son; that was Benjamin. He wasn't the favorite; that was Joseph. Asher lived his early life in the shadows, learning to be content with the leftovers.

Besides that, Asher grew up in one of history's most dysfunctional families. There was parental favoritism, sibling rivalry, deceit and longstanding resentment. I hope you know there are really no perfect families in the Bible. There's hardly a single model family for anyone to look up to in either awe or envy. Adam and Eve are no sooner out of the garden than one of their sons murders the other. Noah's sons are forced to devise a strategy to hide their father's drunken shame. Jesse's sons, brave and loyal in service of their country, are capricious and cruel to their youngest brother. David is a man after God's own heart and Israel's greatest king, but he can't manage his own household. Even in Jesus' family we see the same thing. In Mark 3 Jesus is healing the sick and fulfilling his call as Messiah, while his mother and brothers are outside trying to get him to come home, convinced he's crazy. The Bible most often portrays the family not as a Norman Rockwell painting, beaming in gratitude around a Thanksgiving turkey, but as a series of broken relationships in need of redemption.

But that doesn't excuse what Asher and his brothers did. Asher participated in something in his youth that was terribly wrong. He joined in on the selfish and hard-hearted scheme to have his half-brother Joseph thrown into a pit and later sold as a slave to

a traveling caravan headed for Egypt. He would later watch his beloved father grieve that loss. Years later, he was part of the delegation of brothers that were petrified to see their brother Joseph, now as the second command in Egypt, again. Asher certainly didn't have the greatest start.

Asher's Surprising Legacy

I'm not sure when or how it happened, but somewhere along the line something began to shift in Asher's life. Somehow he became a different man. We'll never know for sure what brought about his transformation, but what we do know for sure is he left behind a legacy of wisdom, faith, character and service to his nation at large, a legacy not only attached to him but to his descendants. How do I know that?

Asher's sons and stepdaughter

First, we know when Asher went to Egypt he became the father four sons: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi and Beriah. We also know he had daughter, and her name was Serah (Gen. 46:17; 1 Chron. 7:30). What's fascinating about this is Serah was the only granddaughter mentioned among 53 grandsons in the lineage of Jacob. That's not because there weren't other granddaughters. It was customary in a patriarchal society to only list the sons. But for some reason this one woman, Serah, couldn't be left out. Although it's not recorded in the Bible, Jewish history says she was a woman of great virtue and went on to have a tremendous impact. What's even more interesting is Jewish rabbinical literature says Serah was actually Asher's stepdaughter. Apparently, Asher had married a widow named Hadurah when Serah was three years old. So Asher was the father of what we call a blended family. He welcomed Serah into his home, raising her as his own. To be included in his lineage as the only granddaughter she must have held a special place in his heart and lived an exemplary life.

Asher's blessing from Jacob and Moses

Not only was Asher the father of four sons and a daughter, but when his father Jacob was preparing to die he brought each of his twelve sons to his bedside. One by one Jacob gave each a special last word. Honestly, some of them weren't so kind, but he reserved for Asher a unique word of blessing, saying, *"Asher's food will be rich; he will provide delicacies fit for a king"* (Gen. 49:20). We're not sure exactly what that means, it almost sounds like he'll become a culinary expert, but more likely it points to some kind of abundance or prosperity.

Fast forward 400 years. Asher is long gone but his descendants aren't; the tribe of Asher is still very much alive. The people of Israel are getting ready to go in and conquer the Promised Land. Moses is preparing to die but before he does he'll give his own blessing to each of the tribes. He runs through eleven tribes and for some reason doesn't address them in the customary order but waits until the end to speak of the tribe of Asher. To them he says,

"Most blessed of sons is Asher; let him be favored by his brothers, and let him bathe his feet in oil. The bolts of your gates will be iron and bronze, and your strength will equal your days" (Deut. 33:24–25).

I'd like us to think for a few moments about these words, not only what they meant for Asher's descendants but for us. This is quite an amazing thing to say about a man's legacy, especially a man who started as inauspiciously as Asher. It's a reminder to all of us, but especially to the fathers among us, that we simply can't measure the impact of our lives during our lives. We don't always get to see the legacy we leave. We can't always see how the choices we make today will impact our children, and our children's children, and even their children. Here's a man who seemed very average. Here's a man raised in one of the most dysfunctional homes recorded in the Bible. Here's a man who made some huge mistakes early in his life that left deep wounds in his family of origin. Sprinkle on top of that the added challenges of raising a blended family of four sons and a stepdaughter while married to a woman who had lost her first husband, and most of us would think Asher wouldn't produce much of anything lasting at all.

But look what Moses says about his descendants. First, he says, *"Most blessed of sons is Asher..."* This is one of those hard to translate Hebrew phrases as seen by the variety of ways it's rendered in our English translations. The NASB says, "More blessed than sons is Asher..." The KJV says, "Let Asher be blessed with children..." One thing we know is that blessedness was often measured in that culture by the number of your descendants, and so that may very well be what Moses was talking about. In the book of Numbers we're told that not long after the Exodus Asher's descendants multiplied to include over 41,000 fighting men (Num. 1:41). Later in Numbers we learn that before the invasion of Canaan this number increased to 53,400 (Num. 26:47). That's an increase of nearly 30%. That's significant considering the total number of Israel's fighting men decreased by some 2,000 men over the same period of time. God promised Asher a posterity and he delivered. This is something every father desires and should even pray for. Not just that God would give us just physical children, but that he would increase our spiritual posterity; that the Lord would help us reproduce our faith in others. Remember how Paul called Timothy his *"dear son"* in the faith

(2 Tim. 2:2)? He even said to the Galatians he would be in *"the pains of childbirth"* until Christ was formed in them (Gal. 4:19).

The second thing Moses says about Asher's descendants is, *"let him be favored by his brothers."* The word "favored" means "to approve, to be pleased with, to delight in." Asher would be loved by his brothers. There would be a sweet unity between his tribe and the rest of the tribes of Israel. It's almost like he'd be everyone's favorite. There's no reason to be suspicious about this. The Bible talks a lot about the blessing of having favor with others, but this is unusual for brothers. Research shows that up to 45% of adult siblings have relationships marked by rivalry or distance.

The Wall Street Journal featured a story about an 85-year-old man named Al Golden, who still chokes up when he talks about his twin brother Elliott who recently died. The brothers shared a room growing up, graduated from the same college, and then married within a month of each other. Yet Al still remembers how their father often compared them, asking one or the other, "How come you got a B and your brother got an A?" Elliott became a lawyer and eventually a state Supreme Court judge. Al sold life insurance. Al says he always envied his brother's status and secretly took pleasure in knowing at least he was a better fisherman and owned a bigger boat. Even as adults there was a lot of comparison and competition. Then one day Elliott accused Al of not doing enough to take care of their sick mother. After that, Al didn't speak to his brother for over a year. Elliott repeatedly reached out to him, but Al ignored him. Then one day Al received an email from Elliott telling a story about two brothers who had a stream dividing their properties. One brother hired a carpenter to build a fence along the stream, but the carpenter built a bridge by mistake. Al thought about the email, then wrote back, "I'd like to walk over the bridge."

I believe Asher was that kind of a man. He was the kind of man to build a bridge rather than a fence. It reminds me of something said in the book of Proverbs: *"When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him"* (Prov. 16:7). We should pray that we might walk in peace and have favor with those around us. It's inevitable that disagreements, disputes and times of animosity will come between us and our brothers and sisters. But our prayer should be that we'll be the first to seek reconciliation and quick to forgive. Romans 12:18 says, *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."* Ephesians says, *"Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ has forgiven you"* (Eph. 4:32).

The third thing we see in Moses' blessing of Asher's descendants sounds rather strange to us, *"Let him bathe his feet in oil."* What does that mean? Of course, back then washing your feet was a constant need in the dusty terrain. And only the wealthy had the luxury of using olive oil to wash and soothe their feet. But

this makes complete sense because when Joshua divided up the Promised Land between the twelve tribes, he gave the tribe of Asher a piece of land in the area of Galilee, where the soil was rich and olive trees flourished (Josh. 19:24–31). The best olives in all of Palestine were raised where Asher's lot fell. It was even said of that area, "It is easier to raise a legion of olives in Galilee than to bring up a child in Palestine." Even today, one tree will produce 15 gallons of olive oil per season. So you can understand Moses' statement, "let him bathe his feet in oil."

I can't help but think that every Christ-following father listening to this message has dipped his feet in oil. We have an abundance, don't we? More important than any material comforts we have are spiritual blessings. I've been struck lately in reading my Bible how often the spiritual blessings we have are called our "riches in Christ." In Ephesians we read of the "*riches of his grace*" and "*the unfathomable riches in Christ*" (Eph. 2:7; 3:8). In Romans we read of the "*riches of his kindness*" and the "*riches of his glory*" (Rom. 2:4; 9:23).

It's interesting one of the greatest riches we have as believers is the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in us. In the Bible oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. In the old days when a preacher really had it going and the Spirit was moving people used to say, "His feet were dipped in oil." But, in a sense, each one of us has dipped our feet in oil. The Spirit of God regenerated us when we were dead in our sins. And as we go out into the world, he's our Comforter, Helper and Guide. He empowers us to be his witnesses and gives us spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ. Every day we should be dipping our feet in that oil! Without it, our souls will grow weary and sore.

The last thing we see in Moses' blessing of Asher's descendants is: "*The bolts of your gates will be iron and bronze, and your strength will equal your days.*" This is a promise of military strength, the ability to stand against your enemies. The land Asher inherited in the Promised Land was at the northern tip of Israel. They're promised that they would be given strength sufficient to stand against the enemies that would invade from the north. God—through Moses—is saying, "Asher, although you'll be blessed with prosperity, at the same time your enemies will attack you and try to permeate your stronghold, but you'll withstand them, because the bolts of your gates will be iron and bronze, and you'll stand up against the enemy's assaults."

It's no surprise some of Asher's descendants proved to be outstanding warriors in defending Israel. This great legacy is found in 1 Chron. 7:40, "*All these were descendants of Asher—heads of families, choice men, brave warriors and outstanding leaders. The number of men ready for battle, as listed in their genealogy, was 26,000.*" Average Asher has a legacy that went far beyond what he ever imagined: choice men, brave warriors, outstanding leaders.

But that's not all. The last part of verse 25 says, "*your strength will equal your days.*" Another translation says, "as your days, so shall your strength be." Let that promise sink in. We know we're constantly under attack. The Bible says our enemy prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour! But what we learn here is God will give us strength to resist him. And notice what it says: God's strength will come to you daily, as you need it. I often fall into the trap of looking towards the future and thinking, "What if this or that happened to me? What if my wife got really sick? What if one of my kids was killed in that church? What if I got stage four cancer? What if persecution came and I had to deny my faith or face death." I can't imagine how I'd handle any of that. Maybe my faith wouldn't hold up. But look what it says: "as your days, so shall your strength be." You don't get strength from God for tomorrow's trials, you get it for today's trials.

Corrie Ten Boom used to tell of a conversation that took place between she and her father when she was a little girl. "Daddy," she said one day, "I'm afraid that I'll never be strong enough to be a martyr for Jesus Christ." Her father wisely responded, "Tell me, when you take a train trip from Haarlem to Amsterdam, when do I give you the money for the ticket? Three weeks before?" "No, Daddy, you give me the money for the ticket just before we get on the train." "That's right," he replied, "and so it is with God's strength. Our wise Father in heaven knows when you're going to need things too. Today you don't need the strength to be a martyr. But as soon as you're called upon for the honor of facing death for Jesus, He'll supply the strength you need—just in time." Corrie said, "I took great comfort in my father's advice. Later I had to suffer for Jesus in a Nazi concentration camp. He indeed gave me all the courage and power I needed."

Moses is saying to the descendants of Asher and to us, "Yes, you'll face challenges from the enemy. Yes, you'll face hardship and grief and sickness and persecution. But don't worry about tomorrow because as your days, so shall your strength be."

So once again, here's a father who seemed very average. Here's a man raised in a dysfunctional family. Here's a man who sold his own brother into slavery and lied to his father for decades to cover it up. Here's a father of five in what very likely was a blended family. No kings or judges or priests came from his lineage. Here's a very average man who you'd think wouldn't produce much of anything lasting at all. But here's a man who left a legacy that was greatly blessed; a legacy of abundant posterity; a legacy of favor with his brothers; a legacy of feet dipped in oil; and a legacy of strength to withstand the enemy.

One more tidbit to finish it off: Soon after Jesus was born, his parents brought him into the Temple to present him to the Lord, and there they met an old woman named Anna. Listen to what

it says about her: *"There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem"* (Lk. 2:36–38). What a legacy! Average Asher was the progenitor of a wise old widow who recognized that this baby would bring redemption to Jerusalem.

We know that redemption isn't just for Jerusalem, but for the whole world. He brought redemption for very man and woman, every father and mother, every son and daughter, every brother and sister. You may have been raised in the most dysfunctional family known to man. You may have made some mistakes in

your life that caused unnecessary pain for others which you deeply regret. You may not have the picture perfect family of a Norman Rockwell painting. You may never have a President or a billionaire or a superstar athlete in your family line. But who you are today will impact generations to come. You may not get to see much of the legacy you leave. You may not see how the choices you make today will impact your children, and your children's children, and even their children, but they will. You simply can't measure the impact of your life at any point during your life. So take heart and live your life as if every choice is a personal investment that will pay dividends down the road.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No. 1414