

Text: Genesis 47:13-31

Title: "What is your life?"

Time: 9/27/2009 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Answering the question scientifically, "What is life?" has become more complicated than it had been in the past. Lehigh University Biochemist Micheal Behe wrote a book about this fact called *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*. Behe points out that Darwin's idea of evolution by mutation and natural selection fails to account for the fact that the building blocks of life exist at the molecular/biochemical level. He says that Darwin's "black box" is the living cell, and that if Darwin had understood what we do today about each of the trillion living cells that are a part of our living bodies, he would have found his theory about the origin of life preposterous. Here is Behe's description of what has complicated things:

"Shortly after 1950 science advanced to the point where it could determine the shapes and the properties of a few of the molecules that make up living organisms. . . . The cumulative results show with piercing clarity that life is based on machines – machines made of molecules! Molecular machines haul cargo from one place in the cell to another along 'highways' made of other molecules, while still others act as cables, ropes, and pulleys to hold the cell in shape. Machines turn cellular switches on and off, sometimes killing the cell or causing it to grow. Solar-powered machines capture the energy of photons and store it in chemicals. Electrical machines allow current to flow through nerves. Manufacturing machines build other molecular machines, as well as themselves. Cells swim with machines, copy themselves with machinery, ingest food with machinery. In short, highly sophisticated molecular machines control every cellular process. Thus the details of life are finely calibrated, and the machinery of life enormously complex" (4-5).

And so there is a biochemical sense in which we can ask the question, "What is your life?", and the fascinating thing about answering that question is that the more we learn about the science of life, the more we are left with the answer that life is a God-designed miracle that science has not yet completely comprehended.

The Lord wants us to ponder the answer to the question, "What is your life?" The God who designed biochemical life tells us exactly what our life is and what it is not. These are answers that he wants us to know.

The book of James asks its readers directly, "What is your life?" (4:14). It turns out that Genesis 47, like much of the rest of Scripture, has much to say about giving God's answer to this question. Note the number of times "life," "not dying," and "living" are mentioned in the passage (vv. 15, 19, 25, 28). I want our study this morning to be all about God's answer to the question, "What is your life?"

I. Your life does not consist of the things which you possess (vv. 13-26).

Illustration: I read a statistic this past week that the average American child watches about 30,000 TV commercials every year. By the age 65, the average American has watched over 2 million TV commercials. What is the common theme running through most of those messages our culture digests day in and day out? It is the message that in order to really have a life worth living, you must have the product they are selling. The message is that your life does indeed consist of the things you have. If you buy a certain aftershave lotion, you are not only going to smell better and heal from the damage done by the razor, you are going to be the best that a man can get (Gillette). If you buy the right phone service, you will not only be able to make a phone call, you are going to be able to reach out and touch someone (AT&T). If you have the right credit

card in your pocket, you are not only going to be able to make a purchase on credit, you are going to be able to do so everywhere you want to be (Visa). When you want to color your hair, you pick a certain product not only because it will make your hair brown, but more importantly, because you are worth it (L'oreal).

Application: I am thankful for the benefits of capitalism and the material blessings we enjoy as a nation. In our political environment, it is important to say that free markets and the great products they produce are not wrong. These products are gifts of God's blessing.

What is wrong is answering the question, "What is your life?" in terms of how many or how few of these things we possess. That is the philosophy the world wants us to adopt. The Egyptians learned this lesson the hard way. Egypt was, of course, one of the great powers of the ancient world. They were a truly prosperous superpower. But when God sent famine, even this superpower was reduced to being thankful for the opportunities provided by slavery (v. 25). Could you and I live without the creature comforts we enjoy for the glory of God, or does our life consist too much of the things we possess?

Did you notice that at each stage of the hardship caused by the famine, Joseph expects the Egyptians to pay for what they consume? What's more, the Egyptians are happy to do so. In spite of the severity of their need, these people understood that no one should get a free ride, a free lunch. Joseph required that these people pay for their provisions, and then work when they could pay no more. We should look to do the same. The question is never how can someone else be soaked so that I can get more. The question is always, how can I pay a fair price for what I receive.

The society that forgets this principle is ill-prepared to face the kind of hardship that the famine had brought to the land of Egypt in the days of Joseph. In our land, the money available for the free ride ran out long ago, and now we just keep borrowing more, requiring our kids to pay it back someday. That is fools' gold, and it means that our children will not inherit the prosperous country blessed by God that we were given from our parents.

II. Your life is a precious gift of a loving God (vv. 27-28).

Application: We have God's care for the life of Jacob and his family described here. I want us to glean two principles about the way God gives us life from these verses:

A. God gives varying circumstances of life for different purposes at different times (v. 27).

Illustration: In December 2006 an article appeared in the Evangelical flagship magazine, *Christianity Today*, entitled, "What Really Unites Pentecostals? It's not speaking in tongues. It may be the prosperity gospel." In that article the author noted that according to an October 2006 survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, only about 40% of Pentecostals surveyed claimed to speak in tongues. By way of contrast, a large majority of Pentecostals believe in the prosperity gospel:

"As common as belief in miraculous gifts, however, is faith in the prosperity gospel. Renewalists overwhelmingly agree that 'God will grant material prosperity to all believers who have enough faith.' In Nigeria, 95 percent of Pentecostals agree with that statement, and 97 percent agree that 'God will grant good health and relief from sickness to believers who have enough faith.' In the Philippines, 99 percent of Pentecostals agreed with the latter statement."

There is an intentional contrast in verse 27 between Egypt and Israel. God treats the Israelites differently than He does the Egyptians in this passage. He blesses the Israelites with new land and fruitfulness and prosperity, while He afflicts the Egyptians with loss of property and eventual slavery, although He does graciously allow the Egyptians' lives to be spared.

We might quickly conclude from this that those who belong to God and please Him will prosper, and those who do not will not, but that interpretation would be shortsighted. Let's look ahead a bit at the rest of the story from Exod. 1:8-14. What happened? Well, the answer is not to be found in the disobedience of the children of Israel. The answer is to be found in the purposes of God.

God gives varying circumstances of life for different purposes at different times. In Jacob's day, He gave prosperity and freedom for the purpose of multiplication. In Moses's day, He gave oppression and slavery for the purposes of extraction from Egypt and redemption. The common thread here is not that God's people always prosper; it is that God's people are always under the care of the purposes of God's perfect plan for them.

B. God gives the gift of life one day at a time (v. 28).

Application: The phrase translated in our KJV in v. 28 *so the whole age of Jacob was an hundred forty and seven years*, translates a Hebrew idiom that literally says, *and the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were one hundred and forty-seven years*. That idiom emphasizes a truth that we see elsewhere in the Scripture, and that is that God wants us to receive the gift of life as He gives it – one day at a time.

Do you remember what the Lord Jesus preached in His Sermon on the Mount about the gift of life one day at a time? "So

do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt. 6:34). Now I think the story of Joseph taken as a whole indicates that it is not wrong to prepare for the future. This is exactly what God told Joseph to do. We are told in the book of Proverbs that the ants are exceedingly wise because they prepare their food in summer. In fact, preparing for tomorrow can help to not worry about it.

But we do need to realize that each day God gives us is precious. He has given us grace for today, and bright hope for tomorrow, but He has not given us grace for tomorrow, so do not worry about tomorrow today. The Lord taught us to pray for our daily bread, not for bread to last a year or a lifetime. He wants us to live our lives anew and afresh with Him each and every day.

III. Your life is but a vapor (vv. 29-31).

Illustration: I mentioned earlier that the question, "What is your life?" is asked directly by the Book of James. James provides the answer: "It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." What do you think of when you think of a vapor? I tried to think of something, and all I could come up with is the vapors that come off our coffee pot at home when it is done brewing a pot of coffee. The pot chugs along, making all that gurgling noise and spewing all those wonderfully aromatic vapors of steam, and then all at once everything goes silent, and the pot simply sits there. The vapors are suddenly gone, but the product of their work remains behind.

Application: That is what our life is like. Someone has summed up the seven stages of a man's life as spills, drills, thrills, bills, ills, pills, and wills. Well, that last one "wills" captures the truth of Scripture that our life is a vapor, and it is going to end. When it does, we shall leave behind us our legacy,

as Jacob does here, and I want us to notice quickly three things about Jacob's legacy:

A. Jacob left behind a testimony of the faith that saved him.

Jacob referred to dying as "lying down with his fathers." He spoke of it this way even though he knew that he would die in Egypt, not in Canaan where his fathers had died. This life the Bible calls a vapor is not the end; it is only the start. We are immortal and we will live somewhere forever.

And then Jacob asked to be buried in Canaan, the land of the promise made to his fathers. During his lifetime and the lifetimes of his fathers, there had not been much in Canaan for the patriarchs. They owned far more in Egypt than they did in Canaan. But Canaan was the land of promise, and Jacob wanted everyone to know that he believed in God's promise to save him, to raise him up, and to give him the land of Canaan. That promise was, of course, the promise of the coming descendant, the son of Abraham, Jesus Christ who died for Jacob's sins and for our sins. Do you have the saving faith Jacob had in Jesus' power to save and give you an eternal future of life after death?

B. Jacob left behind a son to bury him and to follow him (Gen. 50:24-26).

We need to care for the next generation, a point that we have seen repeatedly emphasized in these latter chapters of Genesis.

C. Jacob left behind an example of worship (v. 31).

When the story of the end of Jacob's life was written, it was said that he was a man who worshipped. Do you have the kind of faith that causes you to worship, or does that practice go missing far too often. Our life is going to end; it is but a

vapor. When it does, we shall not regret any of the time we have spent in worship of our dear Savior. This is going to be the crux of what we do for the rest of eternity, when our lives are no longer “but a vapor.”

Conclusion: So our passage tells that our life does not consist of the things we possess, that it is a gift of God, and that it is a vapor. Now that we know the answer to the question “What is your life?”, what must we change about the way we live? Where we have been materialistic, demanding prosperity, worrisome, and neglectful of worship, we need to remember the Lord’s answer to this question.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching