

Faith looks to God and His Promises

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[0 : 00] Now we're going to read in our Bibles Genesis chapter 50. So we've come to the end of the Jacob and Joseph story.

So last week we were seeing and hearing Jacob's dying words. And then we see what happens next in chapter 50.

Let's hear God's word together. Joseph threw himself upon his father and wept over him and kissed him. Then Joseph directed the physicians in his service to embalm his father Israel.

So the physicians embalmed him, taking a full 40 days, for that was the time required for embalming. And the Egyptians mourned for him 70 days. When the days of mourning had passed, Joseph said to Pharaoh's court, If I have found favour in your eyes, speak to Pharaoh for me.

Tell him, My father made me swear an oath and said, I am about to die. Bury me in the tomb I dug for myself in the land of Canaan. Now let me go up and bury my father, then I will return.

[1 : 10] Pharaoh said, Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear to do. So Joseph went up to bury his father. All Pharaoh's officials accompanied him, the dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of Egypt, besides all the members of Joseph's household and his brothers and those belonging to his father's household.

Only their children and their flocks and herds were left in Goshen. Chariots and horsemen also went up with him. It was a very large company. When they reached the threshing floor of Atad near the Jordan, they lamented loudly and bitterly.

And there Joseph observed a seven-day period of mourning for his father. When the Canaanites who lived there saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning.

That is why that place near the Jordan is called Abel Mizraim. So Jacob's sons did as he had commanded them. They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre, which Abraham had bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field.

After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, together with his brothers and all the others who had gone with him to bury his father. When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?

[2 : 32] So they sent word to Joseph, saying, Your father left these instructions before he died.

This is what you are to say to Joseph. I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.

Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father. When their message came to him, Joseph wept. His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him.

We are your slaves, they said. But Joseph said to them, Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children. And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. Joseph stayed in Egypt along with all his father's family.

He lived 110 years and saw the third generation of Ephraim's children. Also, the children of Machiair son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph's knees. Then Joseph said to his brothers, I am about to die, but God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

[3 : 45] And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, God will surely come to your aid and then you must carry my bones up from this place. So Joseph died at the age of 110 and after they abandoned him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

So we're going to think about that for a few minutes, recognising faith looks to God and his promises.

So we've come to the end of the story of Joseph, which has taken us a few months as a church.

And for us, the story ends obviously in unusual circumstances. Everybody's in their different places and the nation and the world is facing a time of great upheaval.

But you know there's a sense in which that's okay for us because it reminds us as people of faith that we are called to live by faith. You know, what we've seen in the story of Joseph, we've seen that life brings strange plot twists.

And sometimes those are very hard, just as it was with Joseph. But in those times, God is who we look to. God is who we trust.

[4 : 55] That God who is always faithful to his people and his promises. We're also being reminded at the end of this story, as we think about the death of Jacob and the death of Joseph, that life is fragile and that we are fragile.

But that again should help us as the people of God to have that perspective that we look to a better home, that we are just passing through. So for one last time, as we come to the end of Genesis and the end of Jacob and Joseph, let's see what they can teach us.

Two things to think about. First of all, that Jacob and Joseph, they anticipate Exodus. They anticipate what's coming next and ultimately they point us forward to Jesus.

But we also learn that Joseph is someone who trusts God's providence, which I think is something at this time in our lives is useful for us to think about.

So first of all, anticipating Exodus. We'll think about the first 14 verses and then the last few verses, the death of Joseph. What's been the promise theme that we've seen through the story of Jacob?

[6 : 08] Time and again, God has been saying and restating to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I will give you a land. I will make your name great. I will give you blessing.

And even here, as we come to the close, we see the themes of land and a great name are in focus. These promises are beginning to be fulfilled in Jacob and Joseph's lives.

Partly fulfilled, more fulfilled in the Exodus, but ultimately fulfilled with Jesus and his kingdom. But notice how Jacob, this elderly man, is honoured by Egypt.

If you have a look at verses 2 and 3, you'll see that he gets royal treatment in his death. Boys and girls, some of you may have been to the National Museum and seen the mummies from the Egyptian section.

Well, this is what happens to Jacob. He is embalmed. He is mummified. And notice in verse 3 that the Egyptians, as a nation, mourned for him 70 days.

[7 : 19] That's the kind of mourning you would say for a member of the royal family. And then, in verses 6 to 9, we also see the equivalent of a state funeral procession.

We see Joseph, first of all, asking the pharaoh, can I go to the promised land? Can I go back to Canaan and bury my father? And notice this pharaoh says, yes, you may go.

Very different to Moses' pharaoh. He says, no, absolutely not. And God has to work in power to bring them out. Notice that there's a huge crowd of royal officials and dignitaries that go with the body of Jacob.

So that by verse 11, when Jacob is being buried in Canaan, the locals say the Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning.

God has raised up the name, the honour of Jacob because of his son Joseph. So there is the great name, honour being given, even at death.

[8 : 32] And then we see the land emphasis, verse 12 and 13. Jacob's dying words, bury me in the family burial plot in the promised land.

And that's what we see happening. So God has been keeping his promise to this family. Their name is being made great.

And Jacob, his body returns to the land of promise, which he wanted because he wanted to show he was trusting in God and his word.

Now, what about Joseph? How is Joseph's name great? Well, we know, boys and girls, don't we, the story of Joseph, that he becomes a national hero in Egypt.

He goes from being a prisoner to being second in command. And it's his plan that comes from God that saves the nation of Egypt. Now, we're told in verse 22 that Joseph stayed in Egypt along with his father's family and he lived to be 110.

[9 : 36] A little bit of maths for you, boys and girls. He arrived when he was 17. He stayed until he died at 110. How many years did he live in Egypt?

Keep those brains on. 93 years he was living in Egypt. And while he was there, he was given wealth. He was given honour.

He was given that position of being second only to Pharaoh. But notice, just like his father, verse 24 and 25, I am about to die, but God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land, to the land he promised on oath, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath. God will surely come to your aid and then you must carry my bones up from this place. He also wants to be identified with God and the promised land.

And then Genesis ends, verse 26, with the death of Joseph. And he's placed in a coffin in Egypt. And there's almost a sense of, well, what's going to happen next in this family story?

[10 : 54] It's a cliffhanger preparing us for the next book of the Bible, which of course is Exodus. And Exodus is the story of God's promised salvation continuing.

We see that Jacob's family, Joseph's family, grows to become a great nation. We see God working in great power to keep his promises.

We see God raise Moses up to be a deliverer who brings this nation, honored nation out of Egypt towards the promised land.

And what of Joseph and Joseph's bones? Exodus 13 and verse 19, we discover that as Moses was leading the people out of Egypt, chapter 13, verse 19, Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath.

And so if we put those stories together, what we see is Jacob and Joseph, even in death, they both leave Egypt honored. They both leave Egypt anticipating God's promise, God's promised land.

[12 : 08] And that's just like Moses. Moses left and he had been raised up in the estimation of the Egyptians, and he's leading the people of God towards the promised land.

And it reminds us, as we read the Bible, that the Bible is one big story of God's plan to save sinners by his grace, so that by faith in Jesus we might become God's people, living in God's place, under God's rule, and enjoying God's blessing.

And we see Jacob and Joseph, they live with that reality in view. So we're thinking about anticipating Exodus, but I guess the question is, what does this have to do with you and me today? Well, let's think about the times and the circumstances we're living in. Let's think about living in the time of this coronavirus and the crisis. And what are we seeing?

We're seeing many people are trying to get home. And we see desperation among some, we hear sad stories of separation from loved ones, because home is a place of security, isn't it?

[13 : 20] In the midst of chaos, home is a place of security. Jacob and Joseph, they had a vision, a longing for home. For us as Christians, our mindset should be that we are citizens of a different country, that this world is not our home.

We are to set our heart on Jesus and to recognise that where he has gone, we will follow. He has gone to glory and to be with his father, that he's still praying for us, he's still king over us, and he will one day bring us to be with him.

That's home. So we think about heaven as our home, the new heavens and the new earth as our true home. So even when there is insecurity, when our heart is settled there, we can have peace. Also thinking about Joseph's perspective. You know, the country at the moment is, and we're being told, on a wartime footing economically. And that gives us a chance to learn, like Joseph, that if I have lots of wealth, or if that wealth begins to dwindle, if I have status or not, if I have comfort, that is not what should define us.

Joseph's identity, I am someone who's trusting in the promises of God. Christian identity says, I am a child of God.

[14 : 49] I am loved and valued and known and protected by my father, and that's what matters. Joseph, Jacob, Moses, all part of the Exodus story, but they help us to anticipate Jesus' Exodus.

And there is a time recorded in the Gospels where Jesus takes James and Peter and John up a mountain, and there he is transfigured before them.

So his appearance changes for the first time. They see Jesus shining with the glory of God. And while Jesus is on the mountain with the disciples, he's also talking to Moses and to Elijah, another prophet, about his departure, about his Exodus.

He's thinking about his death for sin, for sinners. He's thinking about his resurrection, showing the victory that he won over Satan, sin and death for his people.

He's thinking about his return to the glory of heaven. And just as Moses went before the people of Israel, so Jesus goes before us.

[16:01] He is our forerunner. And where he goes, the Bible promises, if our faith is in him, his people will follow. So we are to look to Jesus.

Jesus, who is described as the author of our faith. He is the one who begins our salvation. He establishes our salvation through his death on the cross.

And he is the perfecter of our faith. That he who has begun a good work in us will carry it on to completion. He will take us safely home.

So we think about Jesus' Exodus as good news for us. But the other thing that really stands out in Joseph's life of faith is that here is someone who is trusting God's providence.

I was reading a few different writers and their thoughts on providence. So here's a few different thoughts. First from the reformer John Calvin.

[17:03] He said that ignorance of providence is the ultimate of all miseries. There is nothing more sad than to not know God's in control and to know the God who's in control.

And by contrast, Calvin said the highest blessedness lies in the knowledge of God's providence.

Victor Hugo, who wrote Les Mis, among other things, he said simply, Go to sleep in peace.

God is awake. It's similar to Psalm 121. Paul Tripp, biblical counsellor, says all God's children can know today that all the things that are out of their control are under the careful control of their heavenly father.

And we're being reminded, aren't we, how much of life is actually out of our control despite our best efforts. But there is comfort as the people of God to know that they are in the careful control of our heavenly father.

So Joseph, as he comes toward the end of his life, and we see he looks back through the years, he looks back to what his brothers did to him.

[18:22] But he sees God's providence as a reality that overarches everything. That providence is a shelter in the storm for him. It's a safe place in the darkness for him.

So what difference does believing in the providence of God make to Joseph? And why is it important to our faith? Well, most significantly, it enables him to see and to trust God's loving plan.

So we see in verse 15 to 19, the brothers are afraid. Their dad is dead. How is Joseph going to treat them now? Has he just been keeping up appearances of family unity?

And so they invent a story. So they go to Joseph and say, well, before dad died, he said, you know, you need to forgive them. They did wrong to you, but you must forgive them. And they throw themselves at the mercy of Joseph.

These brothers are panicking. They realise that they could fall into the hands of Joseph and they're not sure if Joseph means good for them. This pandemic is unsettling many people today as it reminds us of our limitations, as it teaches us that we cannot control or dictate our present and our future, perhaps, as we would like.

[19:40] But what the Joseph story highlights is that the providence of our God is good news. Our God is great and our God is good.

We have a God who works all things together for the good of those who love him. Now Paul wrote that in Romans, but Joseph believed it. In verse 19 and 20, Joseph said to his terrifying brothers, don't be afraid.

Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

You intended evil. God used it for good. Is favouritism good? No. Is jealousy good?

No. Is slavery and false imprisonment, is famine good? No. But is God able to work through those bad things to achieve his good purposes?

[20:48] Yes. And Joseph can see that, that God used all those events and experiences to raise him up so that he might save the nation of Egypt, but more significantly for the biblical story, to save the people to whom God had made those great promises.

God's great good was worked out. The saving of many lives. So for Joseph, the providence of God is a source of hope and comfort, and it has always been for the people of God.

R.C. Sproul, another Bible teacher, says there is no maverick molecule if God is sovereign. We need to recognise that.

Is the coronavirus good? No. But can God use it in his good and wise purposes? Yes. Does God know what's happening?

And more than that, is he in control of what's happening? Yes. And that's good news. And it's encouragement for us to pray to God, indeed to plead with God, that he would work in ways that are wise and good and gracious for us and for people that don't know God.

[22 : 04] We can pray that this might be a time when the many people that perhaps we know who would say that they are happy without God, people, perhaps this time of unsettling would cause many to start to realise their need of God.

That they might start reading their Bibles. They might start praying. They might start thinking, where can I hear a message that can give me hope in the face of all this fear? Perhaps there is the loss of things that people value.

Perhaps as we lose things that we value. Maybe it will cause us to reprioritise and to seek and to treasure the treasure in heaven.

Maybe it will be that God will use our loss of community for a short time to give us, in the long term, a high view of church.

To realise what we are missing. So that we will be glad to be able to gather together to worship. Maybe it will teach us the importance of community so that as society, as nations, we will make room for others.

[23 : 15] That we would care for the lonely, we would care for the isolated, we would do mercy. Maybe this time will remind us of how fragile life is.

So that we would eagerly hold on to and share the gospel. To see that our only hope in life and in death is that we belong to God and to Jesus, our Saviour.

It's a comforting truth in the Joseph story that God in his providence can use a spectacular evil. The hatred of brothers who would sell him into slavery to achieve a great good.

Now when we think through the pages of history, what is the most spectacular sin on those pages of history? What was when cruel men killed Jesus, the Son of God?

That greatest evil. But from that and through that and in the plan of God came God's greatest good. God's greatest expression of his love.

[24 : 29] The saving of many lives. Not from famine, but from living under the just judgment of God against our sin. Living in slavery to sin.

Unable to break free from it. Unable to have peace with God. Apart from Jesus coming to die for us. And so through the cross comes that great good of our salvation.

Of us becoming children of God. Today have you received the goodness of God through Jesus in your life?

Do you know his love as a personal reality? This is a time for you to think about what really matters.

To think about the grace and the love that God offers you in sending his son Jesus to die for you.

To take your place, to take your punishment so that you might live.

[25 : 30] And that you might live knowing God is your Father in heaven who cares for you and who works for your good. And for those of us who are Christians, that we would take confidence in believing that since God is for us, who and indeed what can be against us.

That our hearts will be settled on God. Joseph believed his life and his times were in God's hands. He could trust in God's providence and keep looking to God's promises.

As we leave his story, will we look with faith to the God of providence and the God who makes great promises.