

Genesis 46

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[0 : 00] I want to title the sermon from this chapter, A Family with a Future. I have seen a set of paintings on the embarkation and then the arrival of the pilgrims on the Mayflower in 1620.

The set of paintings depicts those who made the journey over the ocean in hopes of providing their families a better future. And in the first of the paintings, there is the ship obviously heading out from the European side of the world, but in the foreground, a host of men and women and children waving who did not make the journey with them.

On the second picture or painting is the commemoration of the arrival of those who went off into a new world and they are on the ground giving thanks to God having arrived in hopes of a better life.

I have thought this week of what it must have been like to have been counted among those who affixed their names to the manifest and who made the journey.

I have thought of the fears that might be rising in their mind as they leave one land for another. I have reflected on the faith that must have been present in their souls as they launched out over the waters, believing that the journey would provide for themselves and their family a better future, just as I have thought about those persons in the foreground of the first painting and perhaps the later regrets that would accompany them for having played it safe and having never left, having never gone, having never looked out for a better land.

[1 : 51] The nameless ones who never entered into the new world. Our text today presents, in a sense, a painting of similar sort.

For the most part, it's a recording of names. Those who went with Jacob on a journey into another world.

It's a list of those who were daring, birthed in desperation of a famine, longing for life and a better world, wanting to be, according to my title, a family with a future.

By the looks of the opening verses, this downward journey to Egypt was not taken without some measure of fear, even by Jacob, or Israel, as he's called in the opening verse.

It almost looks as though he's not going to go at all. Let me read those opening verses again. So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

[3 : 04] And Jacob spoke to Israel in a vision of the night and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here I am. Then he said, I am God, the God of your fathers. Notice this phrase.

Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt. For there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt and I will also bring you up again and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes.

Evidently, while not on a ship with his name on a manifest to a new world, he was being carried by Pharaoh's wagons and he had arrived at the southern border of what was Israel.

And before he left the land, he had fear. He almost didn't go at all. It's interesting then, little facts in the Bible, verse 1, that it says he had come to Beersheba.

I pulled up my atlas this week and thought, Where is Beersheba? And why is he stopping here? And spent a couple of hours just considering his stop, his fear, the place from which he wondered whether he would go forward or not.

[4 : 19] The mention of Beersheba is important and you and I will need to know why. In modern day, it's really in proximity to Basra and to Gaza.

It really is the largest city near the southern border of Israel in the Negev Desert. It sits close to the very slender boundary that separates Israel from the Sinai Peninsula, the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt and the Nile.

It's a border. Look at it on a map. It's this like descending line on a scale that goes from the Mediterranean hooking itself up.

It's a border town. And before he leaves the promised land into which he had come and lived, he feared leaving it.

Beersheba is also a place of his own memories. Careful readers of the Genesis text would learn upon reflection that this is a place where Abraham, his grandfather, had dug a well and provided for his own family inside the land of promise.

[5 : 32] It's a place where Isaac, his father, dug a well and settled disputes that he might remain in the land. Believe it or not, Beersheba is the place of Jacob's own youth.

It's the place from which he stole the birthright of his brother and fled. And so here he is now in a moment as an aged man returning on this road and arriving home, as it were, on the southern border.

And he's afraid of leaving. Why? Simply this. To leave from this city and continue on the journey would be an irretrievable decision for him to exit the land that God had promised to him.

His father, in fact, had been told in a vision earlier, don't go down to Egypt but stay in the land. The fear of leaving the land then is tied to his fear of forfeiting the future for his family.

Anybody have that kind of fear? Putting yourself, your family at risk, leaving that which God you feel has supplied for you. I don't know your fears but thus the importance of the vision.

[6 : 57] The vision in the opening verses comes because the fear is so great. He's not making the journey without a reassurance, the assurance of reassurance that God will go with him or that he can go from the place of God.

And so the vision comes. Jacob, Jacob, here I am. And look at those wonderful words, this assurance.

Do not be afraid to go down for I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt and I will bring you up again. The vision is that God promises to go with him as well as bring him out again.

In other words, this is a temporary exit in my promise and you're not out of my will to leave the land. In this way, let me say it, Jacob's journey here will resemble a later journey also made in fear of a young father by the name of Joseph who had an infant son by the name of Jesus and was told to go down by vision into Egypt for the preservation and the protection of Jesus, the infant son.

And so the Bible story in one way will connect Jacob here and all of his sons going into Egypt believing that God will provide for them in an unknown way in an unknown place that seems contrary to what God would normally want to do just as God promised to protect and provide for Jesus through the ministry of Joseph and his family in an unknown place outside the place of promise.

[8 : 47] What a connection. So it's worth asking if this is a gospel connection that God does for Jesus later what he does for Jacob here, what can he do for you if you understand the death of Christ.

If God can go with Jesus into the grave and then bring him up again can't he be with you anywhere? This is a functional connection to the gospel story that can be derived at from Genesis chapter 46.

If God can decide to protect Jacob and then Jesus by sending them into the bowels of Egypt he is not bound by topographical preferences or geographic boundaries to protect you wherever he would send you.

that ought to get an amen from your soul at least. A good word for those of you who are moving perhaps into Chicago right now in the midst of all your fears landing in a city that's unknown to you and unexpected.

It ought to be some encouragement to the many in our congregation who left last spring for territories unknown the class of 24 massive as it was creating a rebuilding within our own church life that God will go with them God goes before them God has gone before you you don't have to fear the fact that you're here today God's promise is clear I can tell you the strength of the promise the promise is based on the resurrection if God can take Jesus down into the grave and bring them out again he can take you down into Woodlawn he can take you down into Chicago he can take you down to whatever depth you want and he can go with you that is the truth of the scriptures it's a compelling reason then to have faith that today if you've unloaded your wagon this year or in years past and returned your U-Haul or grew up on these streets

[11 : 08] God is here you don't have to fear where he has you in fact it's a good call to remain why would you leave where he's brought you there's encouragement then even from these first four verses for you individually and for you if you have a family I've come to say to you this morning in this opening four verses that your family can have a future anywhere anywhere interestingly though as encouraging as that first paragraph is for us it isn't even the emphasis of the chapter the place of preeminence goes to the middle of the chapter that long list to the names of those who made the journey with him the men and women who affixed their names to the manifest and as we will see just as those opening four verses encourage us that I can have a future because God can take me anywhere here there is an exhortation

I better make sure I'm on that journey and that my name is on that list there's several intriguing observations that could be made about the long list believe me I won't bore you with all of the interesting tidbits that could emerge from the list but it is grouped in an orderly fashion by Jacob's four wives starting with Leah and then moving down to Zilpah and then down to Rachel and then down to Bilhah and gathering the names of each of the four wives it's an interesting thing there's a summary there's a perplexity also in the list about how he actually arrives at a number even by the end you're at there's 66 there's 70 you go to the New Testament there's 75 I mean what's really going on here Robert Alter really just says what he's trying to convey by 70 is in one sense 10 times 7 the fullness of fullness the whole family went but the key thing the writer wants you to know and he wants me to know and I need to deliver you this morning is simply this you are provided with a record of those who went with him these are the names of the people who were the heirs of the promise which is why most of them nearly all of them are men's names and not the women included in the promise through their name but these are the names of the heirs the descendants who would receive the promise this is the family that has a future

I want to show this to you that the emphasis of the chapter is on those who went with him look again at verse 5 the way the narrator tells the story the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father but then the emphasis moves their little ones their wives in the wagons they took their livestock their goods which they had gained in Canaan and they came into Egypt who Jacob here it is and all his offspring with him his sons and his sons sons with him his daughters and his sons daughters all his offspring he brought with him that's the emphasis those who went with him it picks up again in verse 26 all the persons belonging to Jacob who came with him into Egypt those were who were his descendants again the very end all the persons of the house of Jacob this is what the writer wants you to know that when Jacob made his faith filled journey and mitigated the fears that God could go with him into Egypt he didn't go alone in fact the chapter wants you to know

I want to talk about all of those who went with him with him with him interestingly by the time you get 400 years down the line and reading your Bible to numbers the first chapter or so this list of 70 is now over 600 thousand warriors the Bible story basically implying this massive increase of this family you know for me I was thinking of our own church on two occasions this week I've got two lists I was going to bring them up here as show and tell but my conviction that sermons by their words ought to be able to convey more than we can see I've left them down there for you if I don't do well you can come and look at them there's a list 1998 37 names affixed to it it's a precious list to me one by one the reading of real names who left what some thought was the land flowing with milk and honey and arrived to Chicago south side to believe that God wanted something done here as well both both in us he wanted something done but hopefully prayerfully through us 37 names it actually opens we the undersigned persons believing that

God has brought us together and there it is and that's what you have here same thing happened again for our church in the middle of COVID no less I don't know how many churches were formed in COVID online where people sat on Zoom and raised their hands on about 100 different screens and everybody yelled at once I do but there's another list I've got here May 3rd 2020 of an increasing number of names of people who said I am part of the family with a future called Christ Church Chicago and my name is affixed to it but the most important thing to remember about this list in Genesis it doesn't just represent your family or a family or this family it represents literally in the scriptures something much larger God's family and the writer of Genesis has been doing this all the way along early in the book he gave us a long list from Adam through Seth through whom a family with a future would arrive contrasted with a list the names of Cain and his descendants he gave us a list of Abraham and his descendants he gave us a list of Isaac in contrast to the list of Ishmael he gave us a list of Jacob in contrast to the list of Esau this whole book has been trying to say these are the names who had faith and are part of the promise this is the family with a future that's what it's saying it's confirming now that that family of the promise is 70 in number and resides in Egypt think of it for us the proper parallel to consider here is not something ethnic but spiritual it's the relationship that will exist in the Bible story between Jacob's 12 sons and what will later become 12 disciples under the name of Jesus for just as these 12 sons represented the fullness of God's family and their offspring so Jesus will representatively replace this ethnic family through this ethnic family to build a spiritual family from all the nations of the earth and he too will start with 12 and their names are in a list and those names in a list 12 in number will grow which is why in the book of Acts

[19:04] Peter will preach a sermon and they'll actually tell you that list now contains 3,000 names and it will grow and it will grow and it will say there were more people added to that number every day I guess what I'm trying to tell you is even in Mark 3 verses 13 and 14 when you have the list of the disciples it indicates that Jesus called them to himself so that they might be with him it's not just Jesus who's coming with him are you I just got to stop and sit on that for a moment get your name on that list you want to be numbered among those of whom it is said they went with him they went with Jesus they went down into the bowels of death and came out again I am with the name the name of Jesus

I am with him in his death I am with him in his life it is not lost on me last week even that we've had four baptisms in this church from the nations of the world whether it be Hispanic or black or white or Asian four living testimonies saying to you within the last week my name publicly is among them it's growing is your name there this is a list you have to be on this is not a list of names to be overrun you want to one day arrive in heaven and see your name let me put it this way you and your family can have a future anywhere because God can go anywhere but you and your future you and your family can have a future but only in Christ only in Christ this is the family

I could say so many things this is why you join a local church to just say my name is I'm in this I'm in this family my name is on a list somewhere of people that are following Jesus I'm going with people it's all here on the flip side my goodness on the flip side imagine the the tragedy if your name is not on the list which becomes a book of life imagine if you fail to board that ship of the gospel imagine if you're going to walk your own way through the world rather than get on the wagon that carries you heavenward I think even in the book of Revelation this kind of thing exists doesn't it the Bible story even at its close is bent on helping us understand and remember this the book of Revelation then I saw a white throne from his presence the earth the sky fled away no place was found

I saw the dead great and small before the throne and the books were open and another book was open which is the book of life and the dead were judged by what was written in the books according to what they had done or in chapter 21 nothing unclean will ever enter into heaven nor anyone who does what's detestable or false but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life don't be left standing on the shore watching the ship of God's grace with those who have professed Christ and wave at them from the distance and die in your travails and in your sameness never having risked by faith the journey to a better world you can do that this morning simply by placing your faith in Jesus who went everywhere for you even into the bowels of death but came out again and while you and

I will one day go into the bowels of death they will carry many of us from this very auditorium out that door into a hearse six blocks down into a cemetery nevertheless those who are in faith in Christ will be brought up out again!

[24 : 25] anywhere it goes from exhortation that my future must be having my name affixed to the list of Christ but it goes to a surprising but exhilarating end that that future actually begins now not merely forever more I'm fascinated by the way 28 and following closes certainly he sends Judah ahead making way for the family less a huge conflict emerge when all these 70 look for land and try to buy real estate Judah out there preparing the local neighborhood for the arrival of people who are looking for homes to buy but what's fascinating to me is the reunion between Joseph and Jacob which we looked at last week with such internal visceral necessity for Joseph goes by so quickly so little is made of it two verses only verse 29 then

Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to meet Israel his father in Goshen he presented himself to him and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while and Israel said to Joseph now let me die since I've seen your face and I know that you're still alive that's it it's all that's said the family here is divided into a crier Joseph and a non crier Jacob Joseph cries on his neck for a long time you know if you come with me on my family vacation there are now ten adults in the family and if you go to your family at times you're always trying to figure out how do you divide up teams I mean what are the teams within families we're going to do men versus women we're going to do that thing what are we going to do well in my family non criers you can guess which one I am I won't tell you which one my wife is Jacob is a non crier

Joseph I'm glad you're here glad to be with you now I can die and rest in peace but what's interesting is the emphasis isn't on their reunion as much as Joseph preparing in Egypt the opportunity for his family to prosper that's what he really spends his time talking about now look he says you're going to go to Goshen and then when you get to Goshen I'm going to introduce you to Goshen and I'm going to introduce you to Pharaoh and when you get to Pharaoh you're going to say this because Pharaoh is going to give you Goshen I mean when you get to this point what's really interesting to me is Joseph's sense of acting as Israel's real estate broker Joseph was a Goshen was Joseph's plan from the beginning chapter 45 verse 10

I'm going to put you in Goshen Goshen was east of the Nile Goshen was considered part of Egypt but it was just across the river and it was family if anything was growing it was going in Goshen Pharaoh though had simply promised in chapter 45 you're going to get the best of the land so go get your family he had never identified Goshen with the best of the land but now here Joseph is concerned to say notice verse 34 you're going to do all this in order that there's your purpose clause in order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen the very next chapter that we'll see next week Pharaoh himself verse 6 will actually talk about Goshen as the best of the land what do I want to say from that here's the exhilarating truth at times for those who have faith to set out on the journey and put away their fears for those who have faith and affixed their name to

Christ he begins to work out the future of your family and provide for you now not merely in heaven you're getting the best now now this is your best life now there's an element of that in this text that's what he's providing for I'm going to take care of you now in Egypt let me put it to you this way when you become a Christian you get some things now not merely later you get something here not merely in heaven it may be Egypt but I got a bit of Eden I may dwell in Chicago but I got a taste of Canaan that's what he's doing he is setting the family up to flourish some of you have come in here this morning with nothing but can testify that while you thought this part of the city might have been in

[29 : 51] Egypt to you nevertheless you have increased greatly do I have a witness on that has God benefited anyone here over the years that you've been in this city has he done something for you has he provided has given you a roof over your head he's done things many their families have flourished many arrived without children and now children have come to faith many have bank accounts that have risen and we should want that for more among us not less I pray that some renters under God's grace and guidance would become owners I pray that some owners who are distressed!

would be secure I pray that some families without jobs would get jobs and jobs that pay well and Jesus can do all that in Egypt now I know some of you are going to think oh my goodness pastor Helm time for me to leave he succumbed to the health and wealth gospel well if that's true it's probably among those of you who have quite a bit but that's not true I haven't succumbed to anything what I'm trying to say is according to this text Joseph ensures that provision is going to have opportunity for his family to flourish here not just hanging out until you get to heaven I love that so I want to say to you three things then and then I'll shut it down with the fourth one you or your family can have a future anywhere verses one to four you or your family can have a future but it must be in

Christ thus that list of those who are with him third you or your family can have a future now it begins now and of course we must affirm that that which begins now is honestly forever more the blessing that Israel's family will receive here is only temporary isn't it just charted out a few centuries from now they're going to be slaves and you need to get out of there it's going to turn sour it's going to go south let's face it God's family had just been dwelling for seven years in the midst of famine it doesn't mean you're always going to get what you want but it does mean that there are seasons where God will provide in ways that you just unexpectedly couldn't believe even in the midst of famine that's what the Bible is trying to say and this family really in one sense is a picture of the church that you are going to gain!

Heaven forever more you're going to get a Canaan. But if Canaan represents the good of the land that's an eternal picture of heaven, then Egypt represents everything in this world. And what the text is saying, he's going to take care of you here even before he's going to get you there.

Wow, that's so encouraging. If the Bible is true then, when the tide turns, when everything goes south in your life, when jobs fail, you can still know that heaven is your eternal home.

[33 : 32] You can still rest and trust on the promises that he's going to bring you through hard things as well as good things. But the emphasis of this text is provision and opportunity to thrive.

Well, let me see if I can put it and lay this thing down. You and your family can have a future. Anywhere? In Christ.

Now and forever. And if you want the ultimate sign, it sits in front of me. This is the foretaste of the promised land.

Those who take this meal in faith are sustained with everything they need because they have Jesus.

And this is weakness. People would be like, well, where's the big meal? Well, this is the big meal. Take it in faith.

[34 : 39] You already now possess what you will have forevermore. Namely, the provision of your Lord who loves you, who saves you, who looks out for you, who is protecting you, who is leading you, who is planting you, who is moving you.

What a beautiful thing. I have tried, and I am done, in this sermon simply to paint a picture on the canvas of your mind. Not of the Mayflower or those who made sure their names were written down in that book of passage, but one much greater.

I want you to see the painting of God going with Jesus into Egypt and of you being named among those who go down with him. And not only that, I want you to know that he will provide for you, he will comfort you, he has the best for you, he intends the best of everything for you, now and forevermore, forevermore, and he's given it all to you right here.

So come and taste the fullness of heaven by faith in Christ who will supply all your needs.

Our Heavenly Father, as we come to the table, I pray, Lord, that this meal would matter and that it would strengthen and sustain those who have fears, those who are wondering whether you're with them or you left them or they should go or why have they come.

[36 : 16] I pray, Lord, that this table would be an encouragement to the soul of this church as we live for you in this place. In Christ's name, Amen.