

Falsehood vanquished by Truth

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[0 : 00] Let us now turn to the passage that we read, the book of Genesis, chapter 45.

And we may read again at verse 25. So they went up out of Egypt and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob.

And they told him, Joseph is still alive. He is a ruler over all the land of Egypt. And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them.

But when they told him all the words of Joseph which he had said to them, when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to Canaan, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.

And Israel said, it is enough. Joseph, my son, is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.

[1 : 08] Much of the book of Genesis is given over to the life of Joseph.

There are many parallels that could be drawn between Joseph and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And yet, nowhere does the Bible state that Joseph is a type of Christ. But there are many parallels between the life of Joseph and the life of Christ.

And as you read the chapters that deal with the life of Joseph, there are several important and significant facts regarding his renewed relationship with his brothers.

There is knowledge before knowledge. By that I mean Joseph knew his brothers before they knew him.

[2 : 18] And there is a parallel there. So Christ knew every one of us before any of us knew him.

He loved them when they did not love him. So Christ loved us before we loved him.

He saved them before they became aware of their salvation. Everything in the story points to that.

He called his brothers when they might have preferred to run from.

And that again has parallels in the relationship between Christ and his people. And so we have this marvelous account of reconciliation brought about in the family of Jacob when there is this self-disclosure made by Joseph.

And I suppose there is a parallel there too. When Joseph discloses his identity to his brothers and says, I am Joseph.

[3 : 34] Do you see a parallel there with an incident in the New Testament? The woman that came to the well. And remember the marvelous self-disclosure of Christ.

I that speak unto thee am he. When he disclosed his identity as the Messiah. Did you notice in the reading of the chapter how often there is reference to God in verses 5 to 9?

Because Joseph looks beyond secondary causes towards the actions of a sovereign God. And yet interesting as that theme might be, it's not my focus this evening.

I wish to look at the words of our text under three headings. First, the conflict between faith and unbelief. As illustrated for us by Jacob.

Secondly, the compelling evidence. And that leads thirdly to a certain decision. The conflict between faith and unbelief.

[4 : 49] When you read what the Bible tells us about this man Jacob, one thing I think that will strike you is how his emotions have such an impact on his life.

And especially on his faith. And I suppose that is true in a measure of us all. But remember, sight, feelings, and emotions are not the food of faith, but rather Christ as he is set before us in the truth. Yet we know that sight and feelings often play an influential role in our lives, to our detriment spiritually.

And in this particular context, you can see how his emotions, his feelings, affect Jacob's judgment. And cause much strange turmoil when his sons return from their latest trip to Egypt.

[6 : 04] And they give an account of their journey. The main thrust of their report is that their brother Joseph is alive.

Now, Jacob was a believer. Remember, he had been engaged in a wrestling match with God. Perhaps I should rephrase that. God had been engaged in a wrestling match with him. Because you remember, in the narrative that speaks of that wrestling match, a man too cold of Jacob. So you see, it is God who initiated the wrestling match. Yes, Jacob clung to God. But God initiated the wrestling match in order to bring about submission in the life of Jacob to the will of God. And God still does that in the lives of men and women and boys and girls. You could say of Jacob at times, what is written about his grandfather, Abraham. [7 : 16] He grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God. But at other times, I think he comes across as weak and self-pitying.

Remember how he spoke to his sons, you have believed me of my children. Joseph is no more. Simeon is no more. And now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me. Or all these things are against me. And you see there how he is influenced by his emotions and by his feelings. And yet, I for one have to acknowledge that I am immensely grateful that we have an account of Jacob in the scriptures, for I can identify with him in the way that his faith seems to vacillate. Here is a man who was so ready to believe the worst. In some ways, he is like Thomas in the New Testament. When his sons brought him the blood-stained robe that he had lovingly made for his son Joseph, we find him stating, It is my son's robe. [8 : 32] A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces. And then the Bible goes on to tell us how he tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days.

To all his sons and daughters, rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. He jumps to conclusions immediately. He was more than ready to believe the worst. There is no indication that he asked for a search party to be sent out to find conclusive evidence that a wild beast had indeed devoured Joseph. And yet what he believed was not true. It wasn't true. And you know, some people will turn to passages in the Bible which are condemnatory, and they will tell you, that is me. For example, the passage that deals with the foolish virgins. If you turn with them to passages in the Bible that are full of comfort, full of encouragement, full of hope, they refuse to accept that these passages could have anything to do with them. [9 : 55] It's as if we have an inbuilt prejudice to believe everything that militates against us and reject everything that is positive, encouraging, and good.

Had you been able to discuss the matter with Jacob and said to him, What would you say if I told you without doubt that Joseph is alive? Do you not think he would have responded, That it would be my greatest joy if I could but believe that? And it is possible that you are here this evening, and if I were to say to you, Do you believe that Jesus Christ is indeed your Savior? that he loved you and gave himself for you? Do you say, In your inner heart I would give everything to believe that that is true? But when I look into my own heart, I fear it cannot be true. That's where the conflict between faith and unbelief arise.

[11 : 05] Perhaps you will tell me that such a conflict doesn't take place. In the life of the believer. I'd like to quote from a translation of the elegy that was written in Gaelic by Dr. MacDonald of Ferrentosh about his own late father.

It was translated to English by the late principal John MacLeod, one time principal of the then Free Church College and also of the Free North Congregation. He was ministered there. I suppose it loses a little in the translation. But in the translation of this elegy, which MacDonald wrote because of the admiration that he had for his own father. And you find this couplet, unbelief, as he'd acknowledge, often came to pay him court. And then MacDonald goes on to state, Tis my mind and I'll express it. Touch in living faith, where'er it hath been of heaven begotten, unbelief pursues it there. Each one that hath not felt it, as his burden and his woe, say what he may about it. [12 : 29] All his faith is but unsure. Now that's very strong language, isn't it? Perhaps you would find difficulty in accepting it, but that was MacDonald's view.

Each one that hath not felt it, in other words, hath not felt this conflict between faith and unbelief, as his burden and his woe, say what he may about it, all his faith is but unsure.

Now I said that this conflict between faith and unbelief, in my view, is very real. And it seems to me Jacob is an illustration of this conflict.

His emotions, his feelings, are all saying to him that the account cannot be true. It's an impossibility. Did Joseph not die more than 20 years before now?

Couldn't Jacob say, didn't my own eyes see the evidence of the blood-stained road? And is that not often how we reason once we go down this road?

[13:43] I believe that there are believers. I believe that other people are bright believers. But as for me, and there's a but.

Why? Because you tell me, I know my own heart. And you begin an introspective analysis of your own life. And the result is, you conclude that your spot is not the spot of God's children.

And yet, yet, despite your self-analysis, like Peter, your accent or your speech betrays you.

Remember how Peter, in the hall of the high priest, when he was challenged as to his identity and he denied that he had been a follower of Christ, his accent, his dialect, gave away that he was indeed a Galilee and a follower of the Lord Jesus.

So, likewise, your conduct, your lifestyle, also betrays that you, that you, too, have Jesus at the very center of your life.

[14:55] Perhaps you're here and you have not yet professed Christ. Is it true that, like Jacob, in this sense, you are here in the gospel, but you find it difficult to believe that Christ is in you?

The fact that they were telling Jacob that Joseph was alive and governor over the land of Egypt was, in his view, preposterous.

The old man had believed for so long. The very opposite. And he couldn't get out of the trough that he was stuck in.

He had sorrowfully said, Joseph is without torn in pieces. And this idea, though it was most painful and distressing for him, nevertheless, it had eaten its way into his heart and he couldn't get it out of there.

And some tend to write bitter things against themselves. And although what Jacob believed was quite untrue, that Joseph was dead, there are people on the fringe of the church who are like that.

[16:19] And I suppose for want of a better phrase, they have hugged their despair so long that they are reluctant to give it up.

They are like the man who refused to be comforted, or those afflicted ones of whom we read in the psalm, they loathed any kind of food and they drew near to the gate of death.

death. And if you are here this evening and you are struggling between faith and unbelief, may the Holy Spirit give you enlightenment so that the untruths that you have so long believed may be discarded and you may rest on the truth.

for Jacob that Joseph was alive it seemed too good to be true. Joseph alive, his Joseph.

My Joseph, ruler over all the land of Egypt. Now, just think how difficult that was to believe. Here was a son whom he considered dead and his sons now coming to tell him that the son whom he had sent out as a messenger with no real status that he was now the governor over all the land of Egypt.

[17:49] It sounded too good to be true. And there are people who are spiritually just in that state who find it difficult to accept that Jesus died for them, that they have been redeemed with his most precious blood, that their sins have been forgiven.

And they find it difficult to really accept these marvelous truths. And if that is true of you here this evening, you and Jacob are very much alike.

Yet, Jacob was wrong. And so are you, friend. so are you. The news is not too good to be true.

And through not believing his sons, Jacob began to lose heart. When they told him that Joseph was yet alive, we read that Jacob's heart became numb. He was stunned, for he believed them not.

There is nothing that so makes us lose heart and bring on faintness of spirit as unbelief. And David reaffirms this in Psalm 27.

[19:08] He says, I would have lost heart unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. The conflict between faith and unbelief.

Secondly, compelling evidence. And there's three, all beginning with awe. first of all, the reception they received.

When the sons returned, they told of the reception they had received in Egypt. Now, you might argue that these sons were discredited, untrustworthy witnesses.

And you would have good reason for making that allegation. You can imagine how a skillful cross-examination might try to discredit their evidence and bring up their past.

And all the times that they had told falsehoods in the past wouldn't look very good in a cross-examination of their characters.

[20 : 21] But you see, they could testify of the reception they received and what could they tell? They could tell that Joseph had kissed all his brothers and wept on them.

What does that remind you of? Does it not remind you of the way in which the father received the returning prodigal, the wayward prodigal son?

Remember, he ran to meet him, he fell on his neck, and he kissed him. It was an indication of the lavish forgiveness that was bestowed by the father on the returning prodigal.

And here this fact that he kissed his brothers and wept over them is also an indication that there was forgiveness for these men despite what they had done.

And you remember how Joseph is so careful to point out that whatever they had done, God was behind it all. And although he didn't excuse their behavior, yet he is drawing attention to the fact that God was involved in placing him there.

[21 : 35] And the fact that these men received forgiveness, maybe it reminds you of how graciously and mercifully and lovingly the Lord dealt also with you, so that with the psalmist you can sing, with us or with me he dealt not as I sinned, nor did requite my ill.

Can you testify to that this evening? Yes, there was much that the brothers did not know, but of this they were convinced.

On account of the reception they received, Joseph is alive. So, Jesus is alive. Not only did the eleven apostles see him many times, but over five hundred saw him at one time.

And the Son of God, they saw him after he had risen from the dead. There is no fact in history that is better attested than the fact that he was crucified and that he rose again.

The resurrection is as true tonight as it was all these years ago. That Jesus, the Son of God, died on Calvary and was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and the third day rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.

[22 : 57] To this fact, the disciples bore unwavering testimony in the face of great opposition. They were so sure of this truth that they would die rather than deny it.

And many of them did die by the most painful forms of death. Yet, nothing could ever make one of them speak a word to the contrary.

They declared that they had seen him, that they had eaten with him. Some of them could say that they had touched him. Jesus Christ is indeed alive.

And the Holy Spirit bore testimony to that after the ascension of the Savior. Jesus himself appears to John in Patmos.

I am the first and the last, and the living one I died, and behold, I am alive forever more. He spoke with them and he has spoken with you through the truth.

[24 : 08] He had forgiven them, and he, if you are in Christ tonight, has forgiven you. They could tell something else of the reception that they received.

They were seated at a table in Joseph's house, and portions were taken to them from Joseph's table.

You find that in chapter 43. portions were taken to them from Joseph's table. Now, is that not illustrative of what happens to every believer?

You sit at the table of the gospel, and he spreads a rich faith, the rich faith of his truth, before your soul.

Many of you, I don't know, maybe all, have sat at the Lord's table, where you enjoyed fellowship and communion with the Savior, where you were fed and nourished by him.

[25 : 23] And the reason that these brothers were sat at a different table from the Egyptians was because of cultural practices. but it doesn't say that the Egyptians were fed from Joseph's table, but it does say that the brothers received portions from Joseph's table.

Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table. Oh, have you not had portions taken to you from the Lord's table?

has it stimulated your appetite for more? Well, remember this compelling evidence, the reception they received was truthful, trustworthy, although Jacob didn't yet appreciate it.

But more so in the scriptures, the compelling, truthful, trustworthy, dependable evidence is set before us in the Word of God.

Cross-examine it as much as you want. It cannot be discredited. And many have tried. Some have even begun to read the Word of God for the very purpose of seeking to undermine the truth, only to discover that they become convicted by the compelling nature of the truth.

[26 : 56] The reception they received. That's the first item of the compelling evidence. The second is the report they gave. They told him all the words of Joseph which he had said to them.

They kept, in other words, they kept nothing back. I'm quite sure if one brother forgot, then another would step in to say, this was said too.

And so a picture began to unfold of men who had been accused of dishonesty, men whose consciences had been convicted as they reflected on their providence, and the strangeness of their experience before this powerful ruler who was unknown to them.

All the words that he spoke, his inquiry of their father, his attitude to them all, but especially to Benjamin, his urging of them to make speed and return, his specific instruction to them, do not quarrel on the way, oh, how well he knew them, he knew what they were like, he knew how liable they were to fall out on the journey, and also, oh, how brotherly he dealt with them, he gave them provisions provisions for the journey, as well as clothing, he gave them provision for the journey. The journey that was reckoned in those days would take about six weeks for a round trip, three weeks one way and three weeks on the return, so they would need a change of clothing.

[28 : 37] But above all, I come back to the verses to which I referred to at the outset, God sent me before you to preserve life. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth.

It was not you who sent me here, but God. He, God, made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

The constant repetitive emphasis on what God had done, the emphasis by Joseph on the sovereign overriding purpose of God, all of this, as one who was instructed by the Lord and had learned from the Lord through the steps, very painful steps that had been in his life, uncomfortable experiences, but God had been faithful.

and as Jacob heard this report, how like Joseph, the words must have been to Jacob.

Perhaps after many a long year of being forgotten, the experiences of the past were flooding back into the mind of Jacob.

[30 : 08] What experiences? Well, remember the predictions of the dreams of his favorite son. And remember what Jacob says in chapter 37, what is this dream that you have dreamed?

Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you? And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the same in his mind.

The brothers were jealous, but the father kept the same. In other words, he retained this. And it may now be coming back. Remember, we have another incident recorded in the Bible regarding the birth of Christ when the shepherds came and how they told their story.

And the Bible tells us Mary treasured up all these things in her heart. Jacob is doing the very same. It's as if his faith has been informed by the word of God.

And that is how your faith and my faith is to be informed too, by the word of God. So, that's the second compelling evidence.

[31 : 24] The reception, the report, and there is the returning procession. The procession of wagons with which they returned.

Remember, they didn't have these vehicles on the outward journey. The carts or the wagons were given to them by the Egyptians.

and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, we are told, the spirit of their father, Jacob, revived. These were, if you like, the final ingredients in the spiritual smelling salts that brought Jacob round, that lifted his gloom, that gave him a different vision.

Now, do we have modern equivalents for the wagons, or tokens, should I say, New Testament equivalents for the wagons. Spurgeon makes the observation that the Lord's day is such a token.

It is there to focus our attention in a busy world away from the mundane to the spiritual, to the worship of God, to reflect on a relationship to him.

[32 : 43] The proclamation of the gospel. It is also a token of divine goodness and mercy and I suppose that would be the supreme waggon. But that does not exhaust the list, for there are innumerable tokens.

In fact, the Bible reminds us that every good and perfect gift is from God. But it seems to me that these wagons, they were additional.

they were something new. And it makes me think that this could be illustrative of the way in which our eyes are opened to some new truth or to see an old truth more clearly so that we are given an understanding and conviction that we didn't have hitherto.

you. And so you see more of the provision of your Savior in that truth is open to your mind and heart.

And so you have this information written and it's very significant. The spirit of their father Jacob revived and Israel said. Notice how the names are interchangeable.

[34 : 08] Jacob lost heart because he didn't believe. The spirit of their father Jacob revived but it was Israel who spoke. Who was Israel?

The man with whom God wrestled. The man who clung in faith to God. I will not let you go unless you bless me. And God saying to him your name shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.

And so we see faith revived. Faith vibrant and strong in the statement made by Israel.

Compelling evidence. The reception. The report. The returning procession. The conflict between faith and unbelief leading ultimately to a certain decision.

It's enough says Israel. Unlikely as it first appeared I am convinced Joseph my son is still alive I will go and see him before I die.

[35 : 17] Can you hear the note of joyous faith and the language that he employs? You see Israel is the name of surrender to God.

Everyone who surrenders to God are inevitably changed. And you notice he says I will go and see Joseph.

Isn't it interesting? He says nothing about Joseph's status or Joseph's position. That was not the attraction for Jacob.

It was to see Joseph himself. That was the attraction to see Joseph. And that is still the attraction for every child of grace to see the Joseph of the New Testament, to see Jesus.

When you are confronted with the truth, the attraction is to see him above everything. Perhaps those who are mothers here will understand this better than anyone else.

[36 : 30] When you are with child, and as the months go by, you can feel the movement of the child, the kicking of the child, and you may wonder what the child looks like.

Who he or she will resemble? What characteristics will he or she have? And the closer you come to full term, the more excited you become, as you await to see the face of the child you are carrying. And then, despite the trauma and the pain, despite the fact that you might have said never again, when the child is put, given to you, how you forget the trauma and the pain, in the sheer delight of looking on the face of the newborn child, how much more so, with the Christ who is formed in you, and you will see him.

This is the certainty that belongs to those who trust in him. I will see Jesus, just as Joseph was assured, as Jacob was assured, that he would see Joseph.

The believer is assured, I will see Jesus. You know, I don't know if you, perhaps you don't share my kind of imagination, it may say something about me, but when you're in a train, and sometimes if it's long distance you can become very drowsy, and you can almost persuade yourself that the wheels of the train are beating out a message.

[38 : 27] And it seems to me as these wagons made their way down to Egypt, as the wheels went round, they were saying, I will see Joseph, I will see Joseph, I will see Joseph. Every turn of the wheel, I will see Joseph.

And so it is, in the lives of believers, I will see Jesus, I will see Jesus. Joe, Jacob says, I will go and see him before I die.

What he didn't know was that he had 17 years more to live. He didn't know that. But he felt such an old man, at 130 years of age, that he thought he should just manage to see his son, and perhaps die.

And so he says, I will go and see him before I die. death. For every person who has seen Jesus before death, you are assured of seeing him after death too.

You have to see him first before death. See him this side of death to be sure of seeing him on the other side of death.

[39 : 48] death. And the fact that Jacob was so old added urgency to the journey. But surely that tells us it doesn't matter how old we are.

We're never too old to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ or to seek him. Because those who believe in the Son have everlasting life.

I will go and see him. Is there this longing that characterized Jacob to see his natural son?

To see the Christ that has been formed in you? To see him as he really is? not so much his status or his position, but to see him as your Lord and your Savior.

Conflict between faith and unbelief, compelling evidence leading to a certain decision. The time has gone. Let us pray.