

Exiled but faithful

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[0 : 0 0] Oh, Heavenly Father, as we hear your word read and preached now, we pray that your spirit would be at work, opening our eyes and our ears and our hearts, that we would hear you speaking to us and understand and apply what we hear, that you'd be making us more like the Lord Jesus.

And for his sake we pray. Amen. We're reading this morning from Genesis chapter 47, beginning at verse 27. And reading up to 48, verse 8.

Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen, and they gained possessions in it and were fruitful and multiplied greatly. And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt for 17 years.

So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were 147 years. And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal kindly and truly with me.

Do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers. Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place. He answered, I will do as you have said.

[1 : 2 3] And he said, Swear to me. And he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed. After this, Joseph was told, Behold, your father is ill.

So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And it was told to Jacob, Your son Joseph has come to you. Then Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed.

And Jacob said to Joseph, God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me and said to me, Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you.

And I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring and you for an everlasting possession. And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine.

Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance.

[2 : 2 9] As for me, when I came from Paddan to my sorrow, Rachel died in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath. And I buried her there on the way to Ephrath, that is Bethlehem.

When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, Who are these? If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Genesis chapter 49, which is on page 50 of the church Bibles.

Then Jacob called his sons and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come. Assemble and listen, O sons of Jacob.

Listen to Israel, your father. Reuben, Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, preeminent in dignity, and preeminent in power.

Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed, then you defiled it. He went up to my couch.

- [3 : 34] Simeon and Levi are brothers. Weapons of violence are their swords. Let my soul come not into their counsel.
- O my glory, be not joined to their company. For in their anger, they killed men. And in their willfulness, they hamstrung oxen.
- Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel. I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel. Judah, your brothers shall praise you.
- Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies. Your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's cub. From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
- He stooped down. He crouched as a lion, and as a lioness. Who dares rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him.
- [4 : 41] And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Binding his foal to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine, and his vesture in the blood of grapes.
- His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk. It's the word of the Lord. Good morning, everyone. My name's Andy. It's great to see you all.
- Do follow along with the sermon on the sermon sheets, or on the screen behind me. We've prayed, so let's make a start. I wonder if, like me, you listen to Classic FM, if you're a culture vulture.
- You know where you are with Classic FM. You're basically only ever 15 minutes from the Lark Ascending, or the theme tune to Jurassic Park. Both excellent pieces of music.
- But you do have to put up with adverts, and from time to time. And one advert that comes up a lot is for co-op funeral care. And their tagline is, Talking now about funeral plans helps your loved ones.
- [5 : 48] And then they have a couple of minor celebrities come on and talk about what they want to have at their funeral. So Dr. Amir Khan, who's the doctor on Good Morning Britain, apparently, says at his funeral, he wants high-end Asian curry, and he wants to finish off with 90s R&B; music.
- And then Annika Rice, remember her, ask your parents. She's obsessed with the colour blue. And so she wants everyone to wear blue and have a blue coffin.
- Now, listening to Classic FM, every so often as I'm working or in the car, because it chills the kids out, every so often I'm thinking about death when that advert comes on.
- And now, so are you. So let me ask this morning, have you planned your funeral? Have you talked to your loved ones about what you want to happen at your funeral? How would you like to be remembered?
- Perhaps we find those conversations quite awkward, because as a culture, we don't really talk about death. It's not a lesson we get at school, is it?
- [6 : 55] Maths, English, death. We talked about death for a bit during COVID, but now we're back to pushing death to the margins and ignoring it until it happens.
- Even as Christians, I think we hear lots about Jesus has defeated death, yet perhaps we don't talk as much about approaching death as a Christian and what difference that makes.
- Well, as we come to our end of the Joseph story and at the end of Genesis itself, we see two men taking the co-op's advice and talking to their loved ones about their funeral plans.
- And through these closing chapters of Genesis, through Jacob and Joseph, they show us how to die well as a believer, but also to work back from that.

They show us how to live and approach death, how to live in the shadow of death to come, how to live now in the light of the future, how to make decisions now based on death and eternity.

[8 : 08] So two points this morning. So firstly, in the shadow of death, look forward to God's land to come. So Jacob, he's 147 years old, so as any 147 year old would do, he plans his burial.

So if you flick back to chapter 47, verse 29. And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, if now I have found favour in your sight, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal kindly and truly with me.

Do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers. Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place. He answered, I will do as you have said.

And he said, swear to me. And he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed. Jacob, for the past 17 years, has been living the high life in Egypt as much as you can at 147, I guess.

But his funeral plan shows us that his hope is in what's to come. His hope is in the future beyond death. He knows that however comfortable he is, this isn't it.

[9 : 25] God's promises are not yet fulfilled and so he looks forward to them. And then chapter 48 opens with Joseph getting the phone call that no one wants.

Verse 1. After this, Joseph was told, Behold, your father is ill. So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And it was told to Jacob, Your son Joseph has come to you.

Then Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed. And Jacob said to Joseph, God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me and said to me, Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply ye.

And I will make you of a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession. Again, we're brought right back to the promises of Genesis 12 that we've seen all the way through the Joseph story that God repeats.

Jacob is living in the best of the land and all he thinks about is leaving the land. And just so his sons and the readers, us as readers, get their message, Jacob repeats his funeral plan in chapter 49, verse 29 to 32.

[10 : 38] And he opts for the Canaan package. He is to be buried alongside Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca and his wife, Leah. Jacob's heart is in being in the land God has promised him.

Now, you may have heard of David Livingstone. He is a 19th century explorer and missionary. He spent most of his life exploring Africa and telling people the gospel. And when he died in Africa, his companions cut out his heart and buried it under a tree near where he died in Africa.

And his body was shipped back to England and is interred down the road at Westminster Abbey. People would say of David Livingstone, his heart was always in Africa.

And quite literally, it stayed in Africa. Where you could say of Jacob, his heart was always in God's promised land.

So even when he's reunited with his favourite son, he's enjoying the best of life that could offer in Egypt. He's totally focused on God's promises being fulfilled of God's people in God's land enjoying God's continued blessing.

[11 : 58] Jacob's hope in God's promised land is shared by his son Joseph. Joseph, we've been seeing over the last few weeks, he's had a very successful career.

Once in Egypt, he rose to the very top, second to Pharaoh. He married, he had kids, he lived in the best postcode, he reconnected with his estranged family.

Life was great. But as Joseph approached the end of his life, he also looked forward. So flick forward to Genesis chapter 50, and we're going to read verse 24.

And Joseph said to his brothers, I'm about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here. So Joseph died, being 110 years old.

[13 : 05] They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. I wonder what's been passed down to you from previous generations. Maybe some bone china cups or something, or some jewellery.

It's funny to think, actually, when you read that, that it was one of Joseph's sons' job to keep a bag of his bones in the loft, and pass them down the generations until they left Egypt.

what's the big deal about bones? It's a bit strange, isn't it? Well, like Jacob, this is Joseph showing his complete faith in God's promise of a land to come.

It's actually what the writer of the Hebrews picks up on, commending Joseph's faith. It's up with the verse on the screen there. By faith, Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.

And of everything the writer of the Hebrews could have picked about Joseph's faith, shown through his life, he picks this, his death. Because as they approached death, both Jacob and Joseph had sure and certain hope in God's promises being fulfilled.

[14 : 21] They knew what was to come. They knew they were heading to somewhere greater. Indeed, not even Canaan was to be their ultimate home. As the writer of the Hebrews explains, God always had in mind another homeland.

So again, Hebrews 11 sheds light on Jacob and Joseph's mindset. These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

They desire a better country that is a heavenly one. Jacob and Joseph looked forward to another home. only dimly, of course, but they saw that they could go home, really go home, when they reached the heavenly city of God.

And in this way, Jacob and Joseph model the Christian life for us. We enjoy God's continued blessing now with the ups and downs of life, but this is not it.

God's promises are stretching out into the future where God will turn this world into the place where he lives with his people and we experience nothing but his blessing that we heard about at the start of the service.

[15 : 36] A number of years ago, I went to a Christian friend's housewarming party and halfway through, it was a lovely time, halfway through, they gathered, got everyone together, they gave thanks to God for providing them for a home.

But they were very clear that it wasn't their ultimate home. Their house, they would live in for a time and then it would be someone else's house. But they said our home is in a new creation to come.

And then they spoke forward about looking, spoke about going forward, looking forward to going home. That is where we're heading. This life we are just passing through is a great reminder.

And yet, it's so hard to have this continual mindset, isn't it? The world is so alluring. Weekend supplements in newspapers, adverts on social media, any of them designed to make us think about the eternal future?

Of course not. They are all about the here and now, what we can see around us. And then there's also the fact we have sinful hearts. God says, think about the future, your eternal future, and our heart says, don't do that.

[16 : 52] think about the opposite. It's why it's hard for us to think about eternity when perhaps our hands are busy, are busy reaching out to grasp all the world has to offer.

More achievements, more money, more stuff. We just want more stuff. And so we need to keep training ourselves to think about eternity.

We need to help each other think about eternity. We need to help our children think about eternity beyond death. Because that is what Genesis is driving us towards.

Genesis starts with amazing life in the Garden of Eden, God's creation. But it ends in somber death. Genesis fades to black, showing us that however good life gets now, it always ends in death.

death. Now death is hard, it's really painful for those who are left behind, adapting to the new normal. But in the pain, Christians have a future home to look forward to.

[18 : 06] I was reading a book about space to my children this week, and inside the back cover was this quote from Neil Armstrong. On the way back from the moon aboard Apollo 11, he said, no matter where you travel, it's always nice to get home.

That struck me as a great motto for the Christian life. And not just for half-term holidays, but for all of life here now on earth.

So let me be frank, if you died tomorrow, is this how you will be remembered? Is it how I would be remembered if I died on the way home? Well, just as Jacob and Joseph, they look forward to God's promise of a land, of a home to come, so do we now.

In the shadow of death, as we approach death, God's people are to look to future glory, eternity, in God's new creation. And so I don't know how far you plan in advance if you have a five, ten-year plan, if you have a fifty-year plan, will we are to filter it through this.

Yes, parents, you still have to make decisions about schooling. Teenagers, yes, you still have to take exams and think about what to do with your life after you leave school. Yes, we still have to make decisions about jobs and where we're going to live and all those kind of things.

[19 : 33] things. But the fact that we have a future home promised by God in eternity, another life to come, well, that should dominate and shape how we each use our spare life here on earth.

In the shadow of death, we are to look forward to God's land to come. And secondly, then, in the shadow of death, we look forward to God's king to come. In chapter 48, Jacob adopts Joseph's children, Ephraim and Manasseh, into the family of God.

They're going to be tribes in their own right. And then Jacob is about to exit the stage for good, but he takes centre stage one last time. So if you look at chapter 49, verse 1, then Jacob called his sons and said, gather yourselves together that I might tell you what shall happen to you in days to come.

Now this is not Jacob looking at his children and their character traits and making an educated guess about their future. No, he's speaking about a prophet. He's speaking as God's prophet about the long-term future of God's people, that God is going to work out in his sovereignty.

Now succession was an important part of the ancient Near East. It's important today. There's a whole TV programme called succession based on the idea of this which child is of an ailing CEO is going to take over.

[21 : 00] Something similar going on here kind of. Jacob's sons come for the reading of the will and who is going to take over? Who's going to take over the line of the promise?

And so Reuben's through the door first. He's first in every way. He's not just first in birth but power. Three words for power repeated in verse three.

He wants to keep his job but he gets the sack. Verse four. Unstable as water you shall not have preeminence because you went up to your father's bed and then you defiled it.

He went up to my couch. Reuben misused his position and power and slept with his father's servant in Genesis chapter 35. So he's not going to be in charge. He's out of the door. Next through the door are Simeon and Levi, double trouble.

What's in store for them? Verse five. Simeon and Levi are brothers, weapons of violence and their swords are their swords. Let my soul come not into their council.

[22 : 05] O my glory, be not joined to their company for in their anger they killed men and in their willfulness they hamstrung oxen. Curse be their anger for it is fierce and their wrath for it is cruel.

I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel. The future is not looking good for Simeon and Levi either because of their anger spilling out over to mass murder in Genesis chapter 34.

And it's not looking good for these sons as they come through. They're a mixed bag. So if this is a prime minister assembling their cabinet, Zebulun, verse 13, well he gets maritime minister.

Verse 14, Issachar gets work and pensions but his tribe will end up in forced labour. Dan, verse 16, he gets just a secretary but he's a bit of a snake.

Asher, verse 20, he's the minister for food, farming and fisheries. Okay, I'll stop, I'll stop. But the point is, they are a mixed bag, these sons. As we've seen through the Joseph story, if they're going to have full experience of God's future blessing, they need a new leader.

[23 : 17] They need someone with a line of promise is going to come through. Someone who has what it takes to do what God says and to bring that true lasting blessing. Someone who's going to use power in the right way.

Well, then enter Judah. Perhaps he's thinking, gosh, I'm next for the sack. He should do. Remember chapter 38? But then remember chapter 39, he's changed.

He offered himself in the place of Benjamin in the story. And so he doesn't get the sack, but a promotion. Verse 8. Judah, your brothers shall praise you, your hands shall be on the neck of your enemies.

Your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's cub, from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down.

He crouched as a lion and as a lioness. Who dares rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

[24 : 28] Judah is going to be praised among his family, and he's going to put the hand on the neck of his enemies, a way of describing authority, a dominion, a victory.

That's why he's described as a lion, powerful, king of the jungle, top of the food chain. And as the prophecy continues, Jacob becomes more specific. Judah, it will produce kings, and this kingship is signified by the scepter and staff, remaining with the tribe of Judah until God's promised king comes.

Now that promise, that picture, builds over and over, all through the Bible, through people like King David, and Solomon and the rest, until we reach the gospels, until we find out and discover that Jesus is God's promised king to come.

We can talk a little bit about Christmas, it's nearly half term. So Matthew describes how the wise men search for God's newborn king, and they quoted the prophecy from Micah chapter 5 verse 2, And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

Israel. And so Jesus is this fulfillment of the Genesis 49 promise of a king to come. He comes as God's king in the line of Judah to rule, the king who has conquered sin and death.

[25 : 59] He is the one who can bring God's everlasting blessing fully and finally. He is the king God's people are to look forward to.

God's people back then in Genesis chapter 49, they are waiting for this king to come for a first time. Well and today we wait for this same king to come a second time and bring about that eternal life that he has promised all those who put their trust in him.

And so in the shadow of death, God's people are looking forward to a land to come and the king to come. And if we die before he comes, we're looking forward to the day where he will wake all those who die in him and bring them to that land of continued blessing in the new creation.

And we can do that, we can trust that because God is at work. That's what we've seen all the way through this Joseph story, God is at work. It's repeated right at the end as well.

After Jacob dies, Joseph's brothers are worried that Joseph's now going to get their revenge. They thought whilst Jacob was alive, they're kind of protected but now he's gone, now Joseph's going to get us.

[27 : 18] And so chapter 50 verse 15, they send a message to Joseph saying, by the way, Dad told us before he died that you should really forgive us.

We don't know if he did or not, but that's what they're saying. You've got to forgive us. But actually, they needn't have worried because Joseph tells them in verse 20, as for you, you meant evil against me but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today.

As we've seen through the story, all through the sin, all through the suffering, all through the seeming coincidences, God was at work. He was working out His promises.

He was getting His chosen man Joseph to where he wanted to be so he could save the lives of God's people and bless the world. And this is why we now can still look forward in confidence to the future to come because God is still at work through sin, through suffering, through seeming coincidence in our lives to get us to the new creation.

God is at work keeping His promises. He did it before in the birth of Jesus as God's King, fulfilling Genesis 49, and He will do it again. God promises that Jesus will return to bring His people to that land, and so we can look forward to God's King knowing truly that He will come and have complete confidence in that.

[28 : 55] Just as we close, I wonder if you like to walk around cemeteries. When the kids were younger, I found they very quiet, nice little buggy walk actually. They're really interesting as I go around and look at gravestones and see what people put on them.

Lots of things are written. The most common thing written today I think is something in the lines of loving memory of mother, father, sister, grandfather, etc. Which all are great and lovely things to say.

But what used to be more common in centuries past was this, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life. So as Christians, our focus is on an empty tomb.

An empty tomb somewhere that speaks of eternal life. The king, the lion of Judah, who is alive and reigning and will come again to bring us to God's land where we'll enjoy his presence and continued blessing forever.

forever. So it doesn't matter if we don't get everything that we want in this life. It doesn't really matter if we don't get into that university. It doesn't quite matter how well our children do in life.

[30 : 11] What does matter is whether we are trusting in the Lord Jesus. And certainly let me ask, have you planned your funeral?

How would you like to be remembered at your funeral? Wouldn't it be great if you were remembered by loved ones as someone who loved, who lived and died trusting in a future to come?

Someone who is echoing Jacob's words in chapter 49 verse 18, I wait for your salvation O Lord. That's who God's people are.

We are awaiting people, looking forwards to the future and making decisions now based on that future. Not just scratching the itch, trying to get everything we can out of this life, but being governed by the light of eternity.

Let's close in prayer. heavenly father, we praise you that you are a God who keeps your promises, that you are at work, you are still at work today in keeping your promises and that we can trust them, we can trust, we can have sure and certain hope in the resurrection to eternal life to come.

[31 : 31] We can trust that the Lord Jesus will return to bring us there. Heavenly Father, please help us now to contemplate that future, to talk to each other about that future and to make decisions now in light of that future.

Amen.