

Jacob's Faith

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- [0 : 0 0] Let us now turn to the passage that we read, the book of Genesis in chapter 45. And we may read again at verse 25.
- And they went up out of Egypt, that is, the brothers, came into the land of Canaan and to Jacob their father. And they told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt.
- And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not. And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them. When he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived.
- And Israel said, it is enough, Joseph my son is yet alive. I will go and see him before I die.
- Let me say at the outset that nowhere does the Bible state that Joseph is a type of Christ.
- [1 : 1 6] Yet, there are many, many parallels that can be drawn between the life of Joseph and the life of Christ.
- And as you read these chapters that deal with the life of Joseph, there are several important and significant facts, in my view, regarding his renewed relationship with his brothers.
- And the first one is this, there is knowledge before knowledge. By that I mean, Joseph knew his brothers before they knew him.
- And there is a parallel there with Christ. So Christ knew everyone here today, before any of us ever knew him.
- He possessed an intimate knowledge of your life before you ever came to know him. Secondly, Joseph loved his brothers when they didn't love him.
- [2 : 3 3] Again, there is a parallel with Christ. Christ loved you. If you are in Christ today, before you loved him.
- Because he loved you first, as the Bible reminds you. And then the third fact is this, he saved them before they became aware of their salvation.
- And everything in the story points to that. Again, the parallel, Christ provided salvation for you before you ever knew of that salvation.
- And before you ever knew that you had come into Christ. And the fourth fact is this, he called his brothers when they might have preferred to run from him.
- Preferred perhaps to flee, because they were apprehensive as to what might happen. And when Christ called you first, you may too have been very apprehensive as to how he might deal with you.
- [3 : 4 6] And so we have this, in this chapter, this marvelous account of reconciliation brought about in the family of Jacob.
- And did you notice how often there is reference to God in verses 5 to 9? If you look at these verses again.

Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, says Joseph to his brothers, that you sold me hither. For God did send me before you to preserve life.

And then, verse 7, God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth. God sent me to save your lives by a great deliverance.

So it was not you that sent me hither, but God. And he hath made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his house and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

[4 : 50] God hath made me lord of all Egypt. So, you see, Joseph is looking beyond the secondary causes towards the actions of a sovereign God in his life.

These are the lessons that he has learned from his sometimes painful, difficult providences through which he has been taken until he has arrived at this position of power and influence in the land of Egypt.

Well, however interesting these themes might be, they are not my focus today. I wish to look at our text under three headings.

First of all, the conflict between faith and unbelief, as illustrated for us by Jacob. Secondly, the compelling evidence that is presented to him.

And thirdly, the certain decision that Jacob makes. The conflict between faith and unbelief.

[6 : 09] The compelling evidence that are presented to him. And the certain decision that he makes. Well, first the conflict between faith and unbelief.

When you read what the Bible tells us about this man, Jacob. One thing, one thing I think that will strike you is how his emotions have such an impact on his life, and especially his faith.

And you have to remember that sight and feelings are not the food of faith, although they tend to have an influence on the grace of faith in the life of every believer.

But remember, sight and feelings are not the food of faith, but Christ as he is set before us in the truth. He is the bread of life.

He is the food of faith. And yet we know that sight and feelings play an influential role in our lives, to our detriment spiritually.

[7 : 31] And in this particular context, you can see how they affect the judgment of this Old Testament believer and cause such strange turmoil in his life when his sons return from their latest trip to Egypt and give an account of the events that they encountered.

And the main thrust of their report is that their brother Joseph is alive. Now remember, Jacob is a believer.

He is a man who had been engaged in a wrestling match with God. Remember, it was God who initiated the wrestling match, not Jacob. It's important to remember that.

The little things in the Bible that you tend to overlook. A man wrestled with him. You see, God had a purpose in wrestling with Jacob.

He was bringing him into submission to the will of God. And as Jacob wrestled with God, he too was made to cling more to God.

[8 : 49] And so you remember that this man was a believer. He had engaged in the wrestling match. You could say of him at times what was written about his grandfather.

His grandfather, remember, was Abraham. And it's written about Abraham. He grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God. And you could say that about Jacob.

And at other times, Jacob comes across as weak and self-pity. You have believed me of my children. Joseph is no more.

Simeon is no more. And now you will take Benjamin. All this has come against me. Or all these things are against me. And there it's as if he's giving in to the providences that are surrounding him.

And losing sight of the fact that he is in the protective hand of God. Or as David puts it in the psalm that we sung today.

[9 : 53] Where he says, I wake in God's upholding hand. You see? That is how the believer goes through life.

You are in God's upholding hand. But now, I'm going to say that I, for one, have to acknowledge that I am immensely grateful that we have an account of Jacob in the Scriptures.

Why am I grateful? Because I can identify with him in the way that his faith seems to vacillate. How it seems to vary in strength. And that's why I am grateful that he is in the Scriptures.

Here is a man who was, he was so ready to believe the worst. He is like Thomas in the New Testament. When his sons brought to him the bloodstained coat that he had so lovingly had made for Joseph, we find him stating it as my son's robe.

You know, he doesn't engage in any kind of assessment of the situation. Immediately, he believes the worst. A fierce animal has devoured him. And the brothers didn't have to say anything.

[11 : 02] All they had to do was to present the bloodstained garment. And Jacob immediately believed the worst. He is without doubt torn to pieces. And he tore his garments.

And he put on the clothes of mourning. And you remember how the Bible tells us that he mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and daughters rose up to comfort him.

But he refused to be comforted. He was more than ready to believe the worst. And no indication that he wished a search party of any kind to go out to find conclusive evidence that a wild beast had indeed devoured Joseph.

You see, he believed what was not true. On the grounds of circumstantial evidence. It's never safe to take circumstantial evidence without assessing a situation carefully and getting to the kernel of the matter.

And Joseph, Jacob believed what was not true. And you know, people are like that to this day. They will turn to passages in the Bible which are condemnatory.

[12 : 19] And they will tell you, that is me. They will go with you perhaps to the passage of the foolish virgins. And they will say, that is me. I've met them. They'll go to the most discouraging passages in the Bible.

And they'll say, that's me. And if you turn to passages in the Bible that are encouraging and positive and good, they reject them.

They refuse to believe anything that is written in these passages. It's as if we have an inbuilt prejudice to believe anything that militates.

To believe everything that militates against us. And to reject everything that is positive, encouraging, and good. You know, if you had been able to discuss with Jacob and say to him, what now would you say if I told you without doubt Joseph is alive?

Do you think he would have believed you? And you know, there you go. To people in the community and you say to them, do you believe that Jesus is alive?

[13 : 33] Do you believe that he is Lord and Savior of sinners? Do they believe you? Do they mock you?

Do they laugh in your face? Surely you don't believe such a tale? And you see, that's the kind of situation that we have here. Do you not think that Jacob would have said, you know, I've seen the evidence for myself.

He can't possibly be alive. Or perhaps you're here today and you're saying, I would give everything to believe that it is true. That he loved me and gave himself for me.

Ah, friend, do I hear you sigh. And you're sighing, telling me, that because when you look into your heart, it cannot be true that Christ died for you.

The conflict between faith and unbelief. Perhaps you will tell me that such a conflict does not take place in the life of the believer.

[14 : 45] Well, I think, if you are any length of time on the path of grace, you will discover that there is such a conflict in the life of the believer between faith and unbelief.

And I'm going to quote from one of my favourite ministers of the past, of the late Dr. MacDonald of Herrentosh.

And he wrote an elegy to his late father. His father was 95, I believe, when he died.

It was written in Gaelic, of course. And he had such tremendous regard for his father, the way he lived his Christian life. And this elegy was written in Gaelic, but it was translated by the late principal John MacLeod, who was once in the Free Church College, as it once was, and he was also in the Free North Church in Inverness, long before my time.

But you'll find this line in the English translation, unbelief, as he'd acknowledge, often came to pay him court. That's what MacDonald said, wrote about his father.

[16 : 06] And then he 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.

And then he writes something very strong. And each one that hath not felt it as his burden and his woe, say what he may about it. All his faith is but ensure.

Now that's strong language, isn't it? You might have difficulty swallowing that. That's very strong.

But I have no difficulty myself in accepting what MacDonald writes there. You have to balance it, of course, against the Word of God, as you have to balance everything.

It's strong language, but in my view it's deserving of careful thought. Now, I said that this conflict between faith and unbelief is very real. And Jacob is an example of this conflict.

[17 : 10] His emotions and his feelings are all saying to him that the news he has received cannot be true. It's an impossibility. Didn't Joseph die over 20 years ago?

Didn't my own eyes see the evidence? Is that not how we reason once we go down this road? I believe that there are believers.

And then you go on to say, but as for me, why do you go on to reason like that? Because you tell me, I know my own heart. And you begin a subjective analysis of your own life.

And the result is that you conclude that your spot is not the spot of his children. And yet, yet, despite your subjective self-analysis, like Peter, remember what the Bible says about Peter when he was in the hall of the high priest and the servant girl was challenging him as to his identity.

And she said to him, your accent or your speech betrays you. No, his accent or his dialect gave him away that he was indeed a Galilean and a follower of Jesus.

[18 : 27] And I'm going to apply that in this way, that your conduct, your lifestyle, also betrays you. That you too have Jesus at the very heart of your life.

And despite the fact that in your subjective analysis that you prepared to believe your emotions and your feelings and give in to your doubts, yet your lifestyle betrays you.

And your lifestyle dictates that Christ is indeed precious to you and at the center of your life. But now, let me address those who have not professed Christ.

Is it true of you that, like Jacob in this sense, you hear the gospel? Jacob heard the news, but he didn't accept it.

He didn't receive it. Perhaps you wish that you could. You see, for this old man, the news about his son seemed altogether incredible.

[19 : 31] The fact that they were telling him he was alive and governor over all the land of Egypt, that was just a fairy tale. He had so long believed the opposite that he could not easily get out of the trough where he was stuck.

He had sorrowfully said, Joseph is without doubt torn in pieces. That's what he believed. And this idea, though it was painful and distressing for him, had nevertheless eaten its way.

into his heart and he couldn't get out of it. No, some write bitter things against themselves. And perhaps you're here today as one of these because you haven't come to follow the Lord in the way that others have.

Perhaps you're saying it's not possible that Christ will save me. He will reject me. But Christ has never rejected a penitent sinner.

Never. Never rejected a penitent sinner. You will find no evidence in the Bible that Christ has rejected a penitent sinner.

[20 : 50] You see, some people, for want of a better phrase, have had their despair for so long that they cannot give it up.

Oh, my friend, is that how you are here today? Have you been hugging your despair that you're lost to give it up?

Are you like the man who refused to be comforted? Or those afflicted ones of whom we read and sang in Psalm 22, they loathed any, Psalm 107 rather, they loathed any kind of food.

And they drew near the gates of death. And you know, when people are terminally ill, food is one of the last things that they want when they're weak and facing, struggling with death.

Food is not what they want. But you know, as sinners, food is what we need. Spiritual food. The bread of life is what can feed and sustain our souls.

[22 : 03] Well, here was this man. Are you today? Are you today refusing to believe that there is a Savior, an all-sufficient Savior, that all power is committed into his hands, that he rejoices every hour in the salvation of souls?

Well, the news appeared incredible to Jacob because it seemed too good to be true. Joseph alive. Joseph, my Joseph, ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Well, that seemed an impossibility, didn't it? Cannot be true. Well, do you believe that Jesus died for sinners?

Do you believe that he died to redeem people just like you and me? Unworthy, undeserving. And that is, that's the kind of people that ultimately he takes to heaven to be with himself.

Do you think that's too good to be true? that's what the Bible teaches. Jacob was wrong.

[23 : 26] And so are you today if you think that that is 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 in the context here, Jacob's heart fainted. Or Jacob's heart grew numb.

He was stunned for he did not believe them. And there is nothing that so makes us lose heart and cause faintness of spirit as unbelief.

You remember how David summed it up in Psalm 27, I would have lost heart, he said, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

If he hadn't believed that. Just at the beginning of last week I met a lady who is going through a course of treatment for cancer.

[24 : 34] And I was so pleased to see her out. She's still got a month to go for chemo treatment. And one of the things she said to me that struck with me, I don't know, she said, how people cope when they have no faith.

Don't know how they cope when they have no faith. My friend, don't be like a doubter like Jacob. But trust in the living God and in the power of a living Savior who is able to give you the needed strength and equip you to face the eventualities of life.

So, the conflict between faith and unbelief. Secondly, the compelling evidence. And there's three evidences. He was, Jacob was first of all confronted by the personal testimony of his sons.

Now, you might argue that these sons were untrustworthy, that they were discredited witnesses. And you would have basis for saying that.

You can imagine how a skillful QC in cross-examining these men would portray them in the worst light and would seek to discredit their evidence.

[25 : 56] And you may think that believers are hypocritical in what they profess. But you see, these men, these brothers had just been newly forgiven.

How do we know? Well, we read in the chapter together what happened. He kissed all his brethren and wept upon them. And after that, his brothers talked with him.

What does that remind you of? Does it not remind you of the way in which the father received the returning wayward prodigal son? Remember how he ran to meet him and how he fell on his neck and he kissed him and the kisses were the kisses of forgiveness.

They were tokens and an indication and symbolic of the forgiveness that the father bestowed on the returning prodigal. And here is Joseph doing the exact same thing with his own wayward brethren.

There was forgiveness for these men. And maybe it reminds you, if you are today in Christ, of how graciously, mercifully, and lovingly, the Lord dealt with you.

[27 : 15] So that with the psalmist you can sing today with us or with me, he dealt not as I sinned, nor did requite my ill. Oh, friend, can you sing that?

Yes, there was a whole lot of things the brothers didn't know. and maybe that's how it was with you when you were brought to faith in Christ.

I remember a long time ago being at a question service and one of the elderly brethren who got up to speak at that time stated, you know, that the believer must know Christ in his offices as prophet, priest, and king.

And it was true what he had to say. Because you have to come to know in these offices. But then the next man who got up to speak and he said, when I was brought to Christ, I didn't know he had any offices.

And that is so true too. But you see, you have to go on in knowledge and learn of the value of the offices that are exercised by the Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 27] There were a lot of things that these brothers didn't know, but they knew they had been forgiven. They were absolutely convinced of this too. Joseph is alive.

So is Jesus alive. Not only did the eleven apostles, did they see him many times, but over five hundred, Paul tells the Corinthians saw him at one time, after he had risen from the dead.

There is no fact in history that is better attested than the fact that Jesus was crucified and that he rose again. That's why I believe there have been so many attempts down through the years to seek to discredit the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ because it is a pillar of the Christian faith.

It is just as true today as it was the day it happened. The distance of time doesn't alter the fact Jesus Christ the Son of God who died on Calvary and was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea the third day rose from the dead no more to die and he ascended into heaven where he sits at the right hand of God.

And to this fact his disciples gave unwavering testimony in the face of hostile opposition they were so sure of this truth that many of them died rather than deny it.

[30 : 07] Some of them by the most painful forms of death yet nothing could ever make them speak a word to the contrary.

They declared they had seen him they had eaten with him some of them could say they had touched him. Jesus Christ is alive.

Well do you believe the testimony of these witnesses that Jesus is alive? The Holy Spirit also bore witness to this fact for after the ascension of the Savior the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles and their companions and they began to speak with tongues.

Listen to Jesus' own words I am the first and the last he says to John and the Isle of Patmos and the living when I died and behold I am alive forevermore.

He had spoken with them but he has also spoken to us in the word of his truth. Joseph forgave his brothers and the Bible tells us they received portions from Joseph's table the end of chapter 43 it tells us that how he sent he took and sent messes unto them as it is in the authorized version from before him.

[31 : 50] In other words he fed them from the food of his own table. And so have you my friends sat at the table of the gospel.

As Jesus spread the rich fear of his truth before your soul did you eat and drink of that rich food did you taste and see that God is good or were you like a sick person with no appetite for the truth as it is in Christ.

Well we have compelling evidence too and you remember how the apostle John writes in his first letter that which was from the beginning which we have heard which we have seen with our eyes which we have looked upon a touch without hands concerning the word of life the life was made manifest and we have seen it and testified to it and proclaimed to you the eternal life which was with the father and was made manifest to us that which we have seen and heard there is no lack of evidence compelling truthful trustworthy dependable evidence cross examine it as much as you want but it cannot be discredited many have tried some have even begun reading the Bible without very purpose in mind only to discover that they have become convicted by the compelling nature of the truth as it is set before us in the

Bible well there was the personal testimony but the second personal compelling evidence was this they told him all the words of Joseph which he had said to them which he had spoken to them all the words of Joseph which he had said to in other words they kept nothing back and the picture that you get is this that if one forgot then another would step in to say this was said to have a picture beginning to unfold of men who had been accused of dishonesty men whose consciences had been convicted as they reflected on their providence in Joseph's prison or Joseph's prison is not the same as every other prison and the strangeness of their experience before this powerful ruler all the words his inquiry of their father his attitude to them all but especially to

Benjamin his urging of them to return with speed his specific instruction to them not to quarrel on the way oh how well he knew them and yet oh how lovingly and brotherly he dealt with them he gave them provisions for the journey as well as clothing he gave them provisions for the journey they reckoned in those days it would have taken them six weeks for the round trip three weeks one way and three weeks the other way travel wasn't as quick then as it is today but I come back to this to the verses I read at the outset verses five to nine God sent me before you the emphasis on this the constant repetitive emphasis on what God had done the emphasis by

[35 : 44] Joseph on the sovereign overriding purpose of God in all of this as one who was instructed by the Lord and who had learned through the steps that had been in his life painful steps uncomfortable experiences but God had been faithful and you know how Joseph like would these words have begun to sound in the years of Jacob and perhaps after many a long year have been forgotten the experiences of the past came flooding back into the mind of Jacob what experiences well you remember the predictions of the dreams of his favorite son and you remember 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 this is the important point but his father kept the saints in mind in other words

Joseph Jacob reflected on these things in his own heart he kept the saints in mind it says in the authorized version his father observed the saying and the what I understand from that is that he kept it in mind he kept it in his heart what does that remind you of from the new testament well remember when Christ was born and the shepherds came and all who heard the shepherds wondered what the shepherds told them and then the bible tells us Mary treasured all these things pondering them in her heart Jacob was doing the same and my understanding of that is this his faith was being informed by the word of God that is how your faith and my faith is to be informed to by the word of

God that's your instructor through the word of God our faith is informed and it is taught now there's one other fact of compelling evidence my time is going and that's the procession of the carts or the wagons with which they return do remember the brothers didn't have that kind of transport when they left Canaan and the carts were Egyptian or the wagons when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him that's what the Bible we are told the spirit of their father Jacob revived and these were the the if you like the final ingredient in the spiritual smelling salts that brought round the fainting heart of Jacob it lifted his gloom now do we have modern equivalence for the wagons tokens or should

I say New Testament equivalence for the tokens well Spurgeon has an interesting thought on this he makes the observation that the Lord's day is such a token and you can see Spurgeon is reasoning because the Lord's day is there to focus our attention in a busy world away from the mundane to the spiritual to have one day set aside exclusively for the worship of God not that the other six days you are to ignore God and forget about God but that one day and seven is set aside exclusively for the worship of God so that you get away from the things the busy things the mundane things of this world well that that is a token there is also I would suggest the proclamation of the gospel which is a very specific token of divine goodness and mercy and we ought to cherish it because there are many places in this country where the gospel is not proclaimed but a lip service paid to the gospel which is no gospel at all just just in the last few days

I was at a funeral in Aber Foyle your hair would stand on end if you heard what was being said from the pulpit there no gospel whatsoever and you feel sorry for the amount of people who gather into such buildings that they have been fed what something that is not a gospel at all they don't know what the gospel is and it makes you weep before God that our land has descended into such spiritual impoverishment that the gospel is no longer presented to the minds and hearts of men and women well the gospel is a token of divine goodness and we ought to value it and cherish it lest we too lose the privileges that we have it's the supreme wagon

[41 : 32] I believe well you have this information the spirit of their father Jacob revived and Israel said now you notice the significance of the change of names here it's the same person but how these names are significant here is a man who had lost heart whose heart was numb the spirit of their father Jacob revived but it was Israel who spoke who was Israel he was the man with whom God had wrestled and who had wrestled with God the man who clung in faith to God I will not let you go unless you bless me and you remember God saying your name shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed and so you see how faith is revived how it is refreshed and strengthened and for your faith and mine to be revived and strengthened and refreshed we need to drink from the well that

God has provided for us faith revived vibrant and strong compelling evidence the conflict between faith and unbelief and just a word in conclusion the certain decision it is 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 can you hear the note of joyous faith in the language that he employs you see this is the the name the name Israel is the name of surrender to God the name Israel and everyone who surrenders to God to the power of God is inevitably changed and you notice what he says do you not think it strange he doesn't say anything about

Joseph's position or status have you ever heard parents talking about their offspring oh my son or my daughter this is what they're doing they're in a managerial position here or there they're in a position of influence and a position of power that's not what Jacob is saying he's not concerned with the fact that Joseph is the ruler over Egypt he's only interested in seeing Joseph I will go and see Joseph and you can sense the note of anticipation and the attraction and the longing in the life of this man there's no time to be lost I will see Joseph you know those who are here today and to our mothers you will understand this when you were pregnant with a child and as you felt the child move in the womb you wondered in the days before perhaps you were informed of the gender of the child wondered what the child was like what would its features be like who would it be like what kind of personality would it have all of these things and when you came to full term and despite the pain and perhaps you said never again but when you saw the child and you fell in love with the child that you had carried all these nine months how you rejoiced in seeing the child how much more so for those in whom

Christ has been conceived that they are going to see they are going to see Christ and see him as he is I will see Jesus says the believer I will see Jesus you know maybe just my imagination but when I travel by rail and I'm drowsy I can always make myself believe that the train is speaking as it's traveling and the wheels are going round just think of the wagon wheels as Joseph's going down to Egypt and the wheels are telling the story I will see Joseph I will see Joseph I will see Joseph as the wheels go round oh my friend do you expect to see Jesus are you longing to see him as it truly is in the majesty and glory that belongs to him and we're told

Joseph made the journey I will see Joseph Jacob made the journey I will see him before I die you know he had 17 years yet to live not that he knew that but he felt he was so old had 130 years and he was old and maybe he thought he would just see his son and die oh my friend are you longing to see Jesus you may be up in years that's no deterrent from seeing Jesus do you want to see him before you die to know and experience his power you see age slows you up as you grow older you become aware mentally you think you can do things just as quickly as you did them 50 years ago but then you go and try to do it and you take double the time and perhaps treble the time and your mind refuses to believe that your body is not capable of doing the things that you used to do but oh my friend do you have this that you want to see

[48 : 03] Jesus see him before you die don't say that you're too old to be saved too old to trust in Christ because the person who believes has everlasting life the conflict between faith and unbelief the compelling evidence and the certain decision I will see Joseph oh my friend is there that decision in your life I will see Jesus see him before you die because you will meet him after death either as your savior or as your judge let us pray