

# Nothing but the best for God's people

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn our minds together this evening to Genesis 47. Genesis chapter 47. And if we read at verse 5, and also at verse 11.

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is before you. Settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land.

Let them settle in the land of Goshen. And verse 11. Then Joseph settled his father and brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt in the best of the land.

So twice we have it emphasized that what Jacob's family had come into possession of in the land of Egypt was the best of the land.

Egypt was a very rich land in terms of the quality of the land. But Goshen was the best of it. And it's a passage that reminds us that nothing but the best will do for God's people.

[ 1 : 12 ] That's to say nothing but the best does God have to give them. And does God have for them by way of blessing and inheritance. Now these chapters as you know have to do with Joseph after a long period absent from his brothers through no fault of his.

Coming at last year in chapter 45 to be reunited with them. And it's a very emotional scene as he comes to reveal himself to his brothers so that they realize who it is.

It is in charge of the land of Egypt. They wept. He wept aloud. And Joseph having said, I am Joseph. Then immediately asked, is my father still alive?

And if we can read that without a tear in our eyes, then we don't have much emotion. Because that's really such an emotional point after all of these years that Joseph has not seen his father. And all the years that his father, until very recently before then, was of the view that Joseph was dead. Now he's come to realize that he's alive.

[ 2 : 28 ] And that's when you come into chapter 46 and 47, where the reunion between Joseph and his father, also very emotional, is set before us.

Reunions are quite often very emotional anyway. When you see people that you haven't seen for many years, whether it's at a school reunion or a staff reunion or just a reunion.

But very often they're emotional. People may have changed. And of course there are very often, if not always, vacancies there. People who have passed out of this world that we knew and are no longer in our reunions.

So here is this reunion between Joseph and his father. But following that, we can see that they're settled in the land, this family of Jacob, along with their brother Joseph.

And all that they have are settled in this land of Goshen. And this is really a little bit like what you find happening when you see the weather forecast or something like that.

[ 3 : 32 ] Or if you're used to using Google Maps on your computer or whatever, you know that on the weather forecast, for example, it zooms in on the particular area.

The forecaster has an interest in telling you what the forecast is, whether it's for the Western Isles or Scotland, wherever. And then it zooms out again to give you the picture for not only the whole of the UK, but sometimes even further afield.

That's what's happening in these verses of Genesis. Because God is zooming in on this one family as they settle in the land of Canaan.

But he's also giving us cause to zoom out as you read the chapters around this. Because this family in the land of Egypt, having come from Canaan, are central to his bigger plan.

And his bigger plan involves the Egyptians, not as his people, but as facilitating his people. So that God's plan for his people and God's blessing of his people is actually served by what the Egyptians come to be in relation to them.

[ 4 : 39 ] So the wider picture really is the picture of God's work of grace, God's work of entering into covenant with his people and fulfilling the terms of that covenant through the families of Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob, and then following on in future generations.

That is the bigger picture. That's the big plan. That's the overall picture that God is giving us. And here we're zooming in, or he's zooming in for us on this one family so that you can see things that are particularly appropriate to their circumstances as that fits into the bigger plan of his purpose for his people.

Let's look firstly at the position that Joseph's people or Jacob's family are given here in Egypt. Now it's interesting that first of all you can see their separation from the people of Egypt, from the Egyptians themselves.

And in them being separated from the Egyptians, what you really have emphasized there is the identity of these people, this family of Jacob, the identity that they have as God's covenant people. An identity that does not belong to the Egyptians, but that belongs to them in Egypt. Have you ever wondered why the end of chapter 46 is the way it is?

[ 6 : 10 ] Because you find something there that at first sight seems to be rather strange. Because Joseph is preparing for his brothers or a hand-picked selection of them to meet with Pharaoh, the most important man in the world at the time.

The actual ruler of Egypt. And he's saying to his brothers, when Pharaoh asks you, what is your occupation? This is what you will tell him. You will tell him that your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers, in order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen.

For every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians. Now why would Joseph, knowing that shepherds were an abomination to the Egyptians, why would he tell Pharaoh or say to them to tell Pharaoh that they were shepherds?

If that was going to make them an abomination in the eyes of the Egyptians, why would Joseph do such a thing in regard to his brothers? Well, the reason is there as well in the last verse of the chapter 46.

In order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen. You see, Egyptians thought that looking after sheep was really something beneath them.

[ 7 : 25 ] Something that they would give to hired people of different countries or from other regions. But it wasn't something Egyptians themselves would at all come to do if they could help it because they regarded the job of a shepherd as something of an abomination.

That's the word that's used. And Joseph knew very well that if Pharaoh knew that they were shepherds, he would want to keep them separate. He wouldn't want the Egyptians to go near them and to look after their flocks for them.

They would do that themselves and they would be separate from the Egyptians. And that was the best thing for the Egyptians and for Pharaoh. And it was the best thing of all for these people of God.

It was God's way of ensuring that they were actually separate from the Egyptians around them. From the paganism around them. From the darkness spiritually and morally of Egypt.

And they would preserve their identity as God's covenant people in the land of Goshen. And just really to emphasize how it was God that was doing this for them through Joseph and through the wisdom that he gave to Joseph.

[ 8 : 31 ] God actually twice as we've seen stated. The very best of the land is yours. Not only was he saying I'm going to separate you as my people because you are my people.

You don't belong to the Egyptians. You belong to me. You're going to preserve your identity and your ways. You're going to be considering what I have said to your fathers. And how that is going to be worked out in my plan for you.

And to make absolutely sure that you know that this is the best thing for you. I'm going to give you the best of the land of Egypt. Now that means that the distinctness that applies to Jacob's family. Is something that you pick up here and then take with you through the rest of the Bible. Because the distinctness of God's covenant people is emphasized in different ways in different places.

As you well know in the scriptures. And indeed in many respects that's where we begin when you ask yourself what is my identity as a Christian. When you ask yourself and we ask ourselves what is our identity as a Christian people.

[ 9 : 41 ] As the people of God. You don't look into yourself and ask well I've got faith. And I pray every so often. And I attend worship. These are all hugely important issues.

They are very much features of the lives of Christian people. But that's not what establishes your identity. What establishes your identity is what God has done.

Let me just give you an example in the New Testament in Colossians and chapter 3. And it's interesting how the apostle develops this argument in Colossians 3.

Where he's really saying to seek those things. If you have been raised with Christ. Seek those things that are above. Set your mind on things that are above.

Not on the things that are on the earth. That's what he wants them to do. That's what he's drawing their minds to be doing. And he moves on from that and says. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you.

[ 10 : 37 ] Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness. Which is idolatry. That's then moving on to their moral qualities of life.

And to what they must pursue in that regard. But you see in between is the basis of their identity. Their identity is not actually established by seeking the things which are above.

By setting their minds on the things which are above. Nor is their identity established by living a holy life. And turning away from immorality and impurity.

It's established by this. For you died. That's spiritually. You died to sin. And your life is hidden with Christ in God.

That's your identity he's saying. That's what makes you different. That's what makes you separate from other people. That's why he's using the word therefore in verse 5.

[ 11 : 38 ] Therefore put to death. These sins. That every one of us knows. In our lives we have to put to death. But the therefore means.

It's connected with what you already are. You are already he says. In Christ. Your life is hid with God. In Christ. In God.

That's where you're situated. That's where you're established. As a people. So where is our identity? What is your own identity tonight?

What is my identity? Am I trying to establish my identity as a human being by what I do? Even if it's things which are very good for me to do. Because some people think that's what the Christian life is. That is really a series of putting together good works. Being careful to keep your life in that sort of outward shape. Morally and spiritually.

[ 12 : 37 ] There's nothing wrong with that in itself. Of course not. But that is not the ground. Of what gives us acceptance with God. Or makes us Christians. That's something that God himself does.

In regard to setting us. In Christ. Being born again. Being established on him as our foundation. That's what makes us distinct.

So here is something that really grows from the likes of this passage in the Old Testament. Where God's people are distinct. Where they seek to maintain their distinctness.

As people who are established in Christ. And therefore have to lead a certain way of life that God requires. And not only do you have their separation and identity in their position here.

But secondly. You have an emphasis on their unity. The unity that they have together as a family. And that's really accentuated in some way by reading through the previous chapters.

[ 13 : 41 ] And learning how long. How many years this family has not been together. There have been times when some of the sons have been away from home for some time.

And Jacob is at home himself with the servants. And others of his family. And of course Joseph has been away all these years. And has ended up here in Egypt.

But you read here that Israel. Jacob. Came into Egypt. With his family. With all that he had. And is reunited with Joseph.

And there you have it. The covenant family are together at last. Their unity is established again by God. Or brought about here in Egypt.

And fitting in with that. You've got these names in the previous chapter. Why do we have these lists of names in the Bible? Sometimes we're tempted really just to skip over them.

[ 14 : 43 ] You find them in places like Nehemiah. And all the people there listed who actually helped to repair the walls of Jerusalem. In Nehemiah's day. And there's a whole list there. And when you're reading through Nehemiah.

The temptation is. Well it's just a list of names. And there's nothing much in that. It's an interesting formal record of the names. But let's move on to the next chapter. It mustn't do that. Because you have to ask yourself. Well if it's just a formal record and nothing more. What's it doing in the Bible? What's it doing as part of God's word? And here what you find emphasized is. Here are the names of the descendants of Israel. Who came into Egypt. Jacob and his sons. And then you have the list. And then you have the account of the family settling in the land of Goshen. The region of Goshen in Egypt. In other words there's all the way through there. An emphasis on the unity of God's people. Now they don't have to be together of course. [15:41] In as this is also worked through in the Bible's teaching. That doesn't mean that you only have the unity. When they are all together in one place at any one time. There are many people in this district tonight.

Who can't be here with us. Who are God's people. But they're united with us spiritually. And we are united. As a people of God. With other people of God. Right through the world. With whom God has entered into covenant. Who have come to engage with God. As worshippers. And to whom God has confirmed his covenant promises.

As he has to ourselves. And all the way through the Bible. Especially when you come to the likes of the Apostle Paul. And indeed in Jesus' own great prayer. In John 17.

You find that one of his great burdens. As he prays to the Father. Is that his people may be one. That his people may indeed appreciate their unity. Even if they're in different places.

[16:43] Just as Peter is saying. As he begins his first letter. He addresses them at the very beginning of the letter. Peter to the strangers. To the exiles.

Scattered throughout the regions of Pontus. Galatia. Cappadocia. Asia. Bithynia. And then he says. Elect. Elect.

By God the Father. God. And to obedience and sprinkling. Of the blood of Christ. They're scattered all through these regions.

They're at a distance geographically from each other. But they are all summarized wonderfully. By Peter's use of that same word. Elect. They are God's people.

They're God's chosen people. They are God's covenant people. And the fact that they're scattered geographically. Does not really in any sense. Mar the fact that they are united together.

[17:42] As his people. And that unity. Is so important. That the apostle again. As he writes to the Ephesians this time. You recall how he. Enters into a.

Prolonged passage in Ephesians 4. About the way in which they are to. Regard themselves as one in Christ. I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling.

To which you have been called. With all humility and gentleness. With patience. Bearing with one another in love. Eager to maintain the unity of the spirit.

In the bond of peace. There's one body. One spirit. One hope that belongs to your calling. One Lord. One faith. One baptism. One God. And father of all.

Who is over all. And through all. Now Paul goes out to. Then describe how the body is made up of different parts. The spiritual body that God's people are.

[18:39] But they all fit together into. A spiritual unity. Where God's gifts of each one. Correspond to and fit into the gifts. That are given to the others.

But this is what he said. That you have to be eager. To maintain the unity of the spirit. In the bond of peace. The unity we have together in Christ. Is a spirit created unity.

We don't create it ourselves. We don't bring it about ourselves. It comes about through the power. And through the work of grace. When God changes us inwardly.

Brings us to know himself. Makes us new creations in Christ. Then he places us into fellowship with others of the same. We come to be one body of people.

Sharing the same life of the spirit. The one spirit of God. God. But then he does say. You have to be eager to maintain that unity of the spirit.

[19:38] In the bond of peace. God has created the unity that we enjoy. But he has made us responsible to look after it.

To nourish it for him. To cherish it. To regard it as something precious. And to realize that it is one of the great privileges and gifts.

That God has given to his people. That he has made them one. In Christ Jesus. That they have that identity. But along with it they have this spiritual unity.

Thirdly in that position. There is something else here that is very interesting in Genesis. Because not only do they have this identity and separation in it from the Egyptians.

Not only do they have this unity as a family together in the midst of the darkness of Egypt. They also have a supremacy over the Egyptians.

[ 20 : 40 ] They have a supremacy over the Egyptians. They are actually elevated by God through his blessing.

Above the position that the Egyptians occupy. Because these people of Israel. These people of Jacob. Are the blessed people. As we sang together in Psalm.

They are a blessed people. Who have been chosen by God. The nation that God. The people that God has chosen for himself. They are a blessed people. Being blessed means he has elevated you. He has given you a position above other people. Not because you were deserving of it. Or I was deserving of it. Not because somehow or other we merited it.

Not because he saw something in us. That really made God think. Well these are a better people than any other people in the world. So I will elevate them.

[ 21 : 38 ] I will bless them. There is nothing to do with that. It is just that he chose to do it. In his good pleasure. In his authority.

And by his will. And you see how that has worked out very interestingly. Just think for a moment of what is written there about. Jacob.

Jacob. When Joseph brought him in. To meet Pharaoh. In chapter 47 verse 7. Joseph brought in Jacob his father. And stood him before Pharaoh.

And Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Jacob. How many are the days of the years of your life? And so on. And then in verse 10 you read. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And went out from the presence of Pharaoh.

Now is there something remarkable in that? Is there something that seems. The wrong way around in that. Humanly speaking. Well there is.

[ 22 : 33 ] Because you don't expect. An old man. Who has just made his way from Canaan. And is reaching the end of his life. To come before the most powerful man in the world.

And it's that old man. Who blesses the ruler of the world. You'd think it would be the other way about. That Pharaoh pronounced a blessing. Over Jacob. But it's not like that.

It's Jacob. Who blesses Pharaoh. And twice it's mentioned. Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And went out from the presence of Pharaoh. Because you see.

God. By his blessing of Jacob. Has elevated him to a position. Where he is able to bless. This powerful ruler of the world.

Of the time. Pharaoh. You wouldn't. Go to Westminster. And. Especially maybe not to New York.

[ 23 : 27 ] Or to Washington. And expect to be led into the presence of. Donald Trump there. And come away thinking. Well. I'm in a position. Where I'm going to bless him.

And I am supreme. I am. Have. I have supremacy over him. So it's right that. I pronounce the blessing over him. And not him over me. But that's how it is in. In Egypt.

With this old man. Jacob. Pronouncing this blessing. God. Gave him this supremacy. That belongs to his people. Not because they were better people than others.

Not because they were better than the people of Egypt. In themselves. It's just simply a fact of his grace. But it's a great fact. God. And don't ever as Christians.

Let the devil. Or the world. Turn your mind to think. That somehow or other. God has not elevated you. In your grace. In his grace.

[ 24 : 23 ] God has not. God has not. God has not. People will often ask you. When you seek to go out with the gospel. And meet people. And seek to. To speak to them about Jesus.

And to consider the way they live without him. And come to put their trust in Jesus. People say.

What gives you the right? Isn't that how they say? What gives you the right? To tell me how to live?

What gives you people in the church. To actually say anything about how other people should live?

What gives you the right? To have your view of the Lord's day. As a view that you want other people to hold as well.

What gives you the right as a church. To actually say. These are the principles by which human life should be lived. What gives you the right to say any such things? That's the challenge of the world.

That's the challenge of secularism. But you look into your Bible. And you say. Although the world will not understand it. And the secular certainly will reject it. But you hold on to it. Because God has given you.

[ 25 : 23 ] That spiritual supremacy. Not so that you can just go around. Sticking your chest out. And feeling proud of yourself. That's not the effect it has on you.

It actually humbles you. To think that God has looked at the likes of us. And by his blessing. Has elevated us. To a position.

To a level. That those who are not God's covenant people. Don't enjoy. Doesn't give us. In any way. The right to be arrogant. The right.

To be intolerant. Or any of these things. The right to be tactless. And just. Force the truth down people's. Throats. That's not what we're about.

God. But God has given his people. A particular place. In his eyes. And in relation to other people. They're a blessed people.

[ 26 : 22 ] And as a blessed people. He has elevated them. To a position of supremacy. Where they convey his truth. To the society. That he has placed them in.

That's indeed how. God reminded through Moses. The people of Israel. By the time. We come to Deuteronomy. The people of. Israel are then on the borders.

Of the promised land. God. And God. Through Moses. Is pronouncing. His blessing over them. In chapter 33. You can see. As you know.

How he goes through. The various tribes. All the way down through. Mentioning the tribes. And then he comes to summing up. And this is what he says. In summing up.

There is none like. Your God. O Jeshurun. Who rides through the heavens. To your help. The eternal God. Is your dwelling place. Or your refuge.

[ 27 : 21 ] And underneath. At the everlasting arms. Happy. And you could translate that. Blessed. Are you. O Israel. Who is like. To you.

A people. Saved. By the Lord. See. There it is. In a nutshell. Blessed are you. O Israel. Who is like you.

Who can compare themselves. With you. A people. Blessed. Blessed. Blessed. Blessed. Saved. By the Lord. Tonight. You are preparing. To remember the Lord's death.

In the Lord's Supper. You leave your pride behind you. You leave every sense of arrogance. Or self deserving.

Behind you. You leave. You leave. But you don't leave behind you. The dignity you have in Christ. The position that God has given you.

[ 28 : 18 ] The unique place you have as a people of God. In relation to everyone else in the world. And to every other kind of people. Living by whatever philosophies they live their lives by.

You are unique. You are unique. Because you are the people of God. A people saved. By the Lord. Who. Is like unto you.

And that's what's coming through from this passage. In Genesis 47 as well. The identity. And therefore separation of the people. Their unity together.

In the land of Egypt. And their supremacy. In regard to the position. That God has given. And of course he prepared for that. By sending one of them.

Joseph. Who came to be. Under Pharaoh. The ruler of Egypt. And really. The administrator of Egypt. Pharaoh was. Quite prepared to leave everything to Joseph.

[ 29 : 14 ] To administer. The whole government of Egypt. Because he knew. That Joseph had a wisdom. That he didn't have himself. You see. He had elevated Joseph. Even above.

The wisdom of the Egyptians. And Pharaoh recognized it. And he gave him. That position. Again. It's the supremacy. Of God's people. Just think secondly.

Though. I'm just. Going to close with this. That's the position. Of God's people in Egypt. Of Joseph's family. Of Israel's family. And secondly. The providence. Of Joseph's God.

Or of Israel's God. First of all. His timetable. Sometimes his timetable. Is baffling. And fascinating. To look at it. Because. If you didn't know Genesis.

And if you're just starting. To read your Bible. For the first time. And working your way through.

From the beginning. And you didn't know. What was going to happen. In the life of these people. It would really be something.

[ 30 : 11 ] Of a mystery. As to why. God. Is actually bringing. Such things to pass. As the selling of Joseph. Into Egypt. And is being. Bound up in prison.

There for. Such a while. But as it all comes together. You see. It's God's. Timetable. And it's God's plan. And. It belongs to.

The bigger plan. That God has for them. Because. The timetable. Or the time strap. In the immediate. There. In these days. Was just that. God was zooming in.

On this particular. Portion of their life. A family. Here in Egypt. Before that. Joseph had been sold. His family had.

Told lies about him. He had come to be promoted. In Egypt. His brothers had now come. And now. Joseph. Jacob. His father. All that has come.

[ 31 : 07 ] And Goshen. Is ready. For them. Goshen. Incidentally. In. I'm sure you knew this. From Sunday school days even. But. Goshen. In Hebrew. Means light. And it's very interesting.

That. Egypt. For all its. Richness. Is. Associated. In the Bible. With. Darkness. Morally. And spiritually. And yet. Goshen. Is a word. That means light. And it's.

Very. Telling. When the plagues. Are described. Just before. The people of Israel. Hundreds of years. After this. Left Egypt. When God sent. These plagues.

That finally. Persuaded. The successor. Of this Pharaoh. To let them go. That it says. That when. The plague of darkness. Fell upon Egypt. The darkness.

In the homes. Of the Egyptians. Was so thick. You couldn't see your hand. In front of your face. And not even. The dogs. Made a sound. But. The children.

[ 32 : 03 ] Of Israel. Had light. In all their dwellings. They're separate. They're above the rest. God's looking after them. They live in Goshen.

They belong to the land of light. And God's timetable. Is really. For them. Mean time. To settle in Egypt. But then you see. You zoom out. To the bigger picture.

Because. This. At the moment. Is what he's actually. Dealing with them. And. This is what he's saying. But in the long term. God's view of them.

Is that. These are the people. That are destined. For Canaan. The land that flows. With milk and honey. In the zoomed in picture. They're here in Egypt. But when you go out.

Beyond that. And when the picture pans out. God's got his eye. On the Exodus. And after the Exodus. 40 years. Pilgrimage. Through the wilderness.

[ 33 : 00 ] And at the end of that. Settling. In the land of Canaan. That's the bigger picture. For them. And even that's not. The bigger picture. Because it connects. With the New Testament.

And with God's covenant. People there in Christ. And with the pilgrimage. Of this life. And with the inheritance. Of glory. In eternity. But.

Our lives. Within that. Are within. A very small slice. Of the bigger picture. And timetable. Of God. So everything here.

Is about God's plan. And although sometimes. In God's plan. We may feel that. God's plan for us. Is really. Not the kind of thing.

That's going to benefit us. Very much. Or at least. We may question. How it is. How can certain things. Fit into God's plan.

[ 33 : 59 ] For our good. How can certain things. Be for our. Ultimate benefit. As individuals. Or as congregations. How can events.

In God's providence. That we cannot fathom. How can they actually. Prove to be ultimately. For the good of his cause. Well only God knows that.

And as the bigger picture. Unfolds. We are required. Simply to follow him. To accept his will. And to place ourselves.

Daily in his hands. And to ask him. Lord show me your ways. Teach me your paths. If tonight.

You've got an Egypt. Or a type of Egypt. In your own experience. If you lift up your eyes. You'll find. That there's a Goshen.

[ 34 : 56 ] Somewhere near you. God never brings his people. To Egypt. Without providing for them. Without. Indeed. As we saw this morning. With Elijah. Without his command.

Going ahead of them. And that's what you find here. In the case of these people. In Egypt as well. As Joseph himself. In fact said. In chapter 45.

And from verse 5. Don't he said. Be distressed. To his brothers. Don't be distressed. Or angry with yourselves. Because you sold me here. For God has sent me. Before you.

To preserve life. It was not you. Who sent me here. But God. He has made me. A father to Pharaoh. And Lord. Of all his house.

You would never have imagined that. Years before. When Joseph. Was first brought to Egypt. When he was languishing. In the prison.

[ 35 : 55 ] Having been wrongly accused. But here he is. And he's come to realize. God's purpose. He didn't know it at the beginning. Neither do we.

It's only as we wait on the Lord. Put our trust in him daily. That we are warranted. To believe that God will make the way. Clear to us.

It may not look good to you just now. The way God. Is dealing with your life. It may feel to you. That you really are in Egypt.

Egypt. But just go back to what he said to Jacob. Just as Jacob was about to set off. God met with him. And God said to him.

Don't be afraid. To go down to Egypt. For there I will make you. A great nation. There.

[ 36 : 54 ] In Egypt. I will make you a great nation. Not only that. He said. And I will go down to Egypt with you. And I will take you back again.

And Joseph shall put his hand. On your eyes. Wherever you are tonight. As a child of God. God is assuring you.

He is not absent from your life. He is not refusing to go down to Egypt with you. He is not afraid to share the dark moments with you.

That is why he is there. That is why he is your God. Because he is committed. To your well being. The best.

And only the best will do. For God's people. Sometimes the way to it. Doesn't seem the best way. But ultimately.

[ 37 : 59 ] That is what it turns out to be. Because God. Is true. To his word. Let's pray. Amen.