

Reassurance at a Critical Time

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Date: 11 August 2013

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back today to the passage we read in Genesis chapter 46 and we're going to look at verses 1 to 4. Genesis 46 and at verses 1 to 4.

Here we find Jacob packing up to move from Canaan to Egypt. And this of course as we read in the previous chapter is on the invitation of not only Joseph, his son, whom he has discovered to be alive and who is the governor of Egypt, but also Pharaoh himself who actually gave not only permission but even instruction to Joseph regarding his father to bring him down to Egypt, that he would have the best of the land of Egypt at his disposal.

So here we find Israel who is of course Jacob, another name for Jacob, coming to Beersheba, stopping there to give sacrifices to God.

And then being assured by God that he need not be afraid to go down to Egypt. And that's really the main theme of our study this morning. How Jacob is here reassured by God with regard to this next step that he needs to take in his life's experience, in his journey.

It is going to be a great step for him. Because he took all that he had. He was not going on holiday. He was not going there for a short time. He was not going there to see just what Egypt was like, to meet with Joseph, to spend a few days with Joseph and then come back to Canaan.

[1 : 33] He was going to Egypt full stop. He was going to take all that he had with him. It was a huge step for him at any time, given what Egypt was, and given that the land of Canaan was the promised land that God had promised in his promises to Isaac and also to Abraham before him, Jacob's father and grandfather.

This is a relocation for him. This is a relocation for him. And he probably knows in his heart that he will not return to Canaan in this life.

That Egypt will be the place where he'll spend the rest of his days. It's a big step. It's a huge step. At this particular stage of his life, too, in his old age.

And he stops at Beersheba. Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

That relates to what you read immediately after that. But why did he stop at Beersheba? What is Beersheba? Beersheba was one of the most southerly towns right on the border of the land of Canaan.

[2 : 47] So he was just about to step out of Canaan and make his way then through to Egypt. So just before he left the territory of Canaan, if you like, he stopped here at Beersheba.

It wasn't just that Beersheba was near the border, near the outskirts of the land of Canaan.

Beersheba was an important place with spiritual associations.

It was the place that had a great place in the history of his father and his grandfather. This is where they had worshipped God.

This is where they had associated promises from God with the future. And this is itself an important place in a spiritual sense for these patriarchs, for these leaders at the time.

And it's associated especially with the worship of God. Because that is what Jacob did. He offered sacrifices to the God of his father.

[3 : 49] He worshipped. That's how they worshipped, of course, in those days. They brought a sacrifice. As God had instructed, they worshipped through that. And now he worships. As he comes to this place with its associations with his father and grandfather and the promises of God and the worship of God, he stops and he worships before he goes further.

Think about that point. That's important for you and for me too. For all the steps, whether they be small or great, but especially for the big issues of life, for the big decisions, for the big moves in life, for the new beginnings in life.

We need to first of all stop and worship God. Because what Jacob is doing effectively is seeking to have God go with him into this new venture, into this place, Egypt, where he has to spend the rest of his days.

He's concerned that before he goes further, before he leaves the outskirts of Canaan, he will stop and worship this God and seek this God and seek this God's blessing and seek that God will be with him into this new venture.

We all have new ventures in life. We all have steps to take that are important for ourselves, for our children, for our grandchildren. We have steps to take all the way through the phases of life, from childhood into youth, from youth into adulthood.

[5 : 14] From school to university, from school to work, from all of these issues in life, from employment to retirement. From this life into eternity.

They're all steps. All in their own way significant. And for each and every one of these, you and I have to stop and worship God and seek that God will go with us.

The only way of knowing the way protected and kept and guided and made sure for us by God. All of these things are packed into this reference that he came to Beersheba and offered sacrifices to the God of his father.

And that's where God comes to reassure him. That doesn't mean that God wouldn't have come to reassure him, but it is without doing this. But it is interesting that it is after Jacob had stopped at Beersheba and entered into this worship of God.

It was then, having done that, that God came to him and spoke to him and reassured him. That's very often how it is. It doesn't mean that God will never speak a word to your heart through the Bible if you've not stopped to worship him.

[6 : 31] If you've not stopped to actually take stock of the situation and seek that God will go with you. But nevertheless, it is usually the case that it's when we take the time to seek God.

And seek to take God with us into the next step of life. That's when God then comes and reassures us and says, I'm here. And this is why I'm here.

And I'm going to go with you. Into this next step. So let's look at the reassurance that came to Jacob at this time. God, first of all, introduced himself.

You notice here in verse 2, God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night and he said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, here am I. Now you'll find in the Bible that kind of language used a number of times.

I've given you a few references there in the notes of the sermon. Chapter 22, verses 1 and 11. God speaking to Abraham. 1 Samuel chapter 3, verse 10.

[7 : 31] God speaking to Samuel. Acts chapter 9. God speaking to Saul of Tarsus. When he stopped him. And when Jesus met him. All of these are similar language to this.

Almost identical in places where the name of the person is called out by God. And the person responds in words similar to this or like this saying, here I am.

In other words, God came and revealed himself to Jacob at this precise moment. Calling out his name to him and actually coming to speak to him and saying, I am the God of your father.

In other words, you find this language used at the big moments in life. The big moments in the life of these people I've mentioned. Abraham, Jacob, Samuel, Saul of Tarsus.

These were the big moments. And the language used like that when you come across this in the Bible. Where God calls out someone's name like this. Jacob, Jacob. Or whatever it is.

[8 : 33] Samuel, Samuel. Saul, Saul. He's saying to these people, this is an important point in your life.

I'm going to do something that you'll remember for the rest of your days. That's going to change your whole perspective. That's going to bring you into a living relationship with me as never before.

That's going to reveal to you something of me. Something of your God and the God of your father.

In a way that will indeed be fresh and new to yourself. And that can happen a number of times.

Maybe it's not going to be for us very likely at least that we'll actually hear our name called by God. And yet still when you read the word of God regularly.

There are times when the word kind of jumps up at you and you know that God is speaking to you. And it hits your heart. It doesn't do it all the time.

[9 : 33] But when it does you realize that this is in fact God's word. That God is addressing you. That God is calling your attention to this whatever it is you're reading about.

To this incident. To this event. To this promise. To this warning. To whatever it is. That's how God deals with us. He introduces himself to us. And he says I am God.

And I'm speaking to you. And I want to say something to you at this point. The big moments. And even for the little moments. We need God to speak to us.

But then we come to the reassurance and encouragement that he received. The first thing that God said to him was when he said I am God. The God of your father.

Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt. Now Jacob had reasons to be afraid. Some people think that Christians really.

[10:31] Especially experienced Christians. That they don't really become afraid in any set of circumstances. But that's not true. Just because a person comes to be afraid of something in this life.

Or afraid of something that might happen. Something that they know is going to happen. It doesn't mean that makes them not to be Christians. It doesn't mean that somehow or other their faith is not really genuine faith at all.

Here's a man who's an experienced believer. Who has seen God at work in his life many times. And yet God at this point comes to reassure him and say Jacob don't be afraid of doing this.

Of going to Egypt. Some of the reasons he had to be afraid. Well there were previous incidents where in fact his father Isaac in chapter 26.

Where there was a similar time of famine. And God spoke to Isaac. And said to Isaac do not go down to Egypt. And he dealt with him in a way that related to King Abimelech at that time.

[11:38] But that was God's instruction to the father of Jacob. Don't go down to Egypt. And his father would have passed on that teaching to Jacob. And yet here is Jacob required to go to Egypt.

And here is God coming to reassure him. Whatever I said to your father Isaac. I'm now saying to you differently. Don't be afraid to go to Egypt. And then he could be afraid perhaps from the point of view of thinking.

Well what if Joseph dies before I die? Will things change then in Egypt? Yes I go down to Egypt just now. I take everything I've got with me into Egypt.

I know that my son Joseph. Who's governor over Egypt. And next to Pharaoh he is going to look after me. I've got his promises. But what if he dies? What if he dies before I do?

What then? What will happen to me? What will happen to my family? And then of course what if Jacob himself died in Egypt?

[12:41] The promise given to himself to his father to his grandfather was that Canaan was to be their inheritance. And in fact Jacob would die in Egypt.

But he wouldn't be buried there as we'll see in a minute. And then he would also know that God had said to his grandfather as you find recorded in chapter 15.

That he, his seed would go into Egypt. His descendants would come to go down to Egypt. And that they would be persecuted there for 400 years.

That they would dwell there for all of these years. And then that God would come and judge the Egyptians after that time had elapsed. So here was Jacob being told you're beginning something in which there's going to be all of these years of suffering for your descendants.

It's not surprising that he might have questions in his mind. That he might have fears in his heart. That he might need such reassurance as God gave him. He had reasons to be afraid.

[13:52] And that will be true of yourself and of myself. Even if we know God's promises for his people. Even if our trust today is in Christ assuredly.

Even if we know that God has promised to look after us. And even if we know that Christ has taken the sting out of death. Still not easy to think.

Of all the issues that might yet be in our lot. And the death that will inevitably be in our lot. It doesn't mean that because we're believers. We're not going to have elements of being afraid.

Or being afraid of other things that come up in the providence of God in our life. How we're going to manage them. How we're going to get out of them. So many different things. That can make us afraid and do make us afraid.

And especially in regard to changes in our life. New beginnings and different experiences. Things perhaps which we've never had before. And we need reassurance.

[15:00] And the great thing is that God throughout the Bible. Is revealed as the God whose concern it is to reassure his people.

To draw near to them to assure them. That he is their God. Look at the number of times throughout the book of Psalms. That you find the psalmist, David and others expressing their discomfort. Their sense of being afraid. And before the psalm finishes. God has revealed himself to them. The psalm very often ends. That begins with a crisis.

With a cry. Ends with a note of great comfort. And that's how it is in life. And you and I are privileged to know this God. Whose concern it is to comfort.

To assure and to reassure. Those who trust in him. That they need not be afraid. For he is with them. But then.

[16:02] There is more than that to it. He doesn't just say to Jacob. Don't be afraid Jacob. That really should have been enough. If God says to us. Don't be afraid to go down to Egypt.

Don't be afraid of this next step in your life. Then that should be enough for us. If God has assured us. That we need not be afraid. But then God does more than that.

Because God in his kindness gives Jacob. Three or four reasons. Why he need not be afraid. And that's what God is like. He doesn't just throw something at you. And say don't be afraid.

He'll tell you the reasons. Why you need not be afraid. He gives us the substance. Of. Why we can be reassured. That he will look after us.

You see God in his kindness. Gives us all this detail in the Bible. He doesn't just give us principles. And then not pack them with reasons.

[16:56] With things which give us information. As to why we need not be afraid. Same when it comes to the commandment. He doesn't just tell us a commandment.

And say this is what you have to do. Or this is what you must not do. He accompanies that with reasons. He feeds our minds. So that we think through. The benefits.

Of doing what God says. And here he comes. And gives reasons for reassurance. First of all he says. There I will make you.

Into a great nation. And he's also of course said to him. I am God. The God of your father. Missed that without.

But it's important itself. Because here is Jacob. With this great change in his life. Late on in life. This new beginning for him.

[17:54] This difficulty of going down to Egypt. And all that he has. It's all about change for Jacob. Big change. Yet here is God saying.

I am God. I am the God of your father. In other words he's saying. Against the background Jacob. Of all this change in your life. I want to reassure you.

That I have not changed. That I am the God of your father. That I am the one who is still. The God of the promises. The God of the covenant. You know just as we were worshipping God there.

And especially during prayer. That thought came to mind. We are actually today. Dealing with the same God.

Who has not changed. In any way whatsoever. From this day that Jacob met him. He met with Jacob. On his way to Egypt. How precious is that?

[18:53] How important is that? That you can say. The God who revealed himself to Jacob. And the substance of the promises. That he gave to Jacob. The truthfulness of this God.

The greatness of this God. The sovereignty of this God. The control of life. Of this God. On the part of God. For his people. Nothing of that has changed.

In fact. God has not changed in any sense. Every change in your life. How incredibly precious. And how comforting it is. For you and I to know that.

However great the change is. In our experience. It is never the case. That God changes with it. God remains.

As he was. As he will be. The same. Dependable. Truthful. Loving. Gracious. Majestic God.

[19:52] That's the God. That went with Jacob. To Egypt. That's the God. That's going with you. Through life. When your faith is in Christ. There he says.

I will make you. A great nation. That's the first reason he's saying. For there I will make you. Into. A great nation. Now. The move to Egypt. Was essential. For Jacob.

And. The reason that Jacob here. Is called Israel. A name that was given him. In his life before this. When he wrestled with the angel. You remember. And. Was given this name by God.

Israel. It's mentioned in this passage. A number of times. Because. It has to do with the future. Of Jacob's descendants. Israel took his journey.

And. Jacob set out for Beersheba. The sons of Israel. Carried. Their father. It's Israel that's going down to Egypt. It's the people that became Israel.

[20 : 51] That are going down to Egypt. In Jacob. And his family. Because there in Egypt. Jacob. Will become Israel. In the sense of being a people.

A great people. A people that will multiply. Despite the cruelties. That Egypt will do to them. And there's a great principle. That arises out of that.

And it's this principle. The principle of. Suffering. And sanctification. It was in Egypt. That Israel became a great nation.

Not where you expect them. To become a great nation. How could you expect. This small group of people. Vulnerable as they are. Especially after Joseph is gone.

And Jacob is gone from the scene. How could you expect this people. Especially when they came to be pressed. And oppressed. By the Egyptians. How could you expect them to become.

[21 : 49] A great nation. In these conditions. In Egypt. You couldn't. Ordinarily. But you can. If you believe in grace.

If you believe in God. Fulfilling his promises. If you believe in the principle. That through suffering. God actually blesses his people. God sanctifies his people.

God uses their suffering. In their experience. And the suffering of his church. In the world. In the experience of his people. To multiply them.

To make them stronger. And you carry that through. Into individual experience as well. God at work. Not just in the history of the church. But in personal experience.

Think of Paul. Think of him in 2 Corinthians 4. As he writes to the Corinthians. Where he says. Our light affliction. Which is momentary.

[22 : 45] Is working for us. A far more exceeding and eternal. Weight of glory. There you see he is saying. All of these sufferings. That he has just been describing. In that chapter.

That happened to himself. Personally. Including. Scourgings. And beatings. And persecutions. But he is calling them. Light afflictions. What is wrong with the man?

How can he call these things. Light affliction. Well there is nothing wrong with the man. In fact.

There is everything right with him. Because he sees things. Through the eyes. Of sanctification. On the part of God. And the way God operates.

In the life of his people. And he calls it. A light affliction. Because it is compared. To the weight of glory. That God has promised. To his people.

This affliction. Is actually a very small thing. And it is working for us. He says. That great weight of glory. And in similar fashion.

[23 : 41] Fashion in chapter 12. Of that same letter. To the Corinthians. 2nd Corinthians 12. You remember. The thorn in the flesh. This providence. That God.

Imposed. In Paul's life. That he prayed. Three times. That it be removed. It was something.

Incredibly painful. We are not sure. What it is. There have been speculation.

As to what that thorn in the flesh is. Whatever it is. Paul says. He pleaded with God. Three times. That he might take it away. And God said no.

As God. Sometimes says. But he said. My grace is sufficient for you. I have given you this pain.

So that through it. You will know me better. So that through it. I will sanctify you further. So that through it. You will know. That it is best for yourself.

[24 : 36] To be weak. And to acknowledge your weakness. So that the strength of Christ. As Paul came. To say. Might operate in me. Because he said. When I am weak.

Then I am strong. That seems like a paradox. Only a Christian can really understand that. But it is great to be able to understand it. That when you realize. Your own weakness.

And the need to depend upon God. It is then that you are made strong. Through that dependence. God's grace. God's strength. God's power.

God's power. Becomes more and more operative. And effective. In sanctifying you. In your life. So that is the first thing. There I will make you. Into a great nation.

And then he says next. I myself. I myself. Will go down with you. To Egypt. Now that is itself. An amazing statement. It would have been a great thing.

[25 : 34] If God had said to Jacob. At this stage in his life. You have to go down to Egypt. Egypt is not Canaan. Egypt is a pagan place. It is full of darkness. It is full of pagan practices.

It is contrary to what I require of my people. It would have been a great thing. If God had said. But I will send. My strongest angel. To go with you. But he goes further than that.

God says. I will go with you. I myself. Will go with you. Into Egypt. How great is that.

How good is that. How assuring is that. For Jacob. As he takes these next steps. Out of Canaan. Into Egypt. He can go on his way.

With a spring in his step. As far as possible. Though he had to be carried. In his old age. Yet in his heart. He could say. And he could sing. I know. That God is going with me.

[26 : 35] I know that he is here. As my companion. And that's. What you have. In Christ. When you are in the Lord.

When the Lord is your God. When you know Christ. As your own. Then this is what you have. It doesn't matter.

What twists and turns. Life may bring you. But Christ is reassuring you. Once mine. Always mine. If you know me with you.

Then I am going to be with you. In the course of your life. And it doesn't matter. What difficult turns. Your life will take. They are never so difficult. That Christ will refuse.

To go along with you. How precious is that. How important is that. Whether it's in a hostile place of work.

[27 : 34] On a hospital bed. Working on a hospital ward. Teaching young children. Being out of work. Going to theatre.

To have serious surgery. Getting treatment. Whatever it is. As far as this is concerned.

God is saying. I am the God of your father. Don't be afraid to go there. I myself will go with you.

And in the highest sense. It really means that. God will go with us. Even as far as.

And into death itself. Because you see. He is saying next there. I will bring you up again. And not so long ago. We looked at. The way the Bible uses. Going down.

[28 : 30] And going up. Going down to Egypt. Going up to Canaan. The language that speaks about. Descent spiritually. And ascent spiritually.

And this. In fact. In these verses. Is the language of resurrection. You'll know that. From reading it yourself. You can see. In the language. That's used. The imagery there. Of resurrection.

Going down to Egypt. And being brought back up again. And this is what God is saying. I will go down with you. I myself. Will go down with you. Into Egypt. And I will bring you up again.

And Jacob. Was going to die in Egypt. But he was not going to be buried in Egypt. His remains. Were going to be taken and buried. In the land of promise. In the land of Canaan. Yes.

God was going to bring him up again. But when you translate that into. Spiritual language. And spiritual experience. For ourselves. What does it mean? Well it means. That one of the great things.

[29 : 25] The Bible teaches. Is that when we think of death. And what death is. And perhaps we don't think of death. Often enough. The world will tell you.

We think of it too often. That we mention it too much. The Bible encourages us. To do that. So that we'll be prepared.

For it when it comes. And what this is saying. Is that. For all those who have come. To place their lives. In the hands of Christ. What's he saying to you today?

Don't be afraid. To go down to death. I myself. Will go down with you. How do you know. That God. Will go down with you. Into death.

That he will accompany you. On the way into the grave. Because he's been there already. The greatest evidence. You and I have. That this promise.

[30 : 20] Is in fact. A promise that is true. Is that the son of God. In our nature. Went into the grave. For us. He went down.

To death himself. Nobody was with him. We couldn't do anything for him. When it came to his death. But he can do everything for us.

When it comes to ours. Because he's already been there. And. I will. Bring you up again. There's the promise.

Of resurrection. The promise. That God will not. Leave us. In the hand of death. Not even our bodies. But that we will be.

Raised again. As the New Testament. So often says. It will be raised up. As second. As first. Thessalonians 4. Puts it. To meet the Lord.

[31 : 16] In the air. When he comes. What a great prospect. That is. Not only is he saying. Don't be afraid. To go down to death. To come to that stage.

Of your life. Where you leave this world. Because I myself. Will go with you. But he's also saying. I will make sure. That you come up again. That your life.

Is not about death. But about resurrection. About life. That is the great thing. That you have. When you are connected. To the resurrection.

And the life. Who is Christ himself. And today. That's our great privilege. As Christians. That in Jesus.

All of this is true for us. He goes with us. Through the issues of life. Through the decisions of life. He tells us not to be afraid.

[32 : 12] He assures us of his company. He says. Even to death. I will be with you. I will remain your God. I will not abandon you. When that moment comes. And I will bring you up again.

I will bring you. To be with myself. And then he says finally. That Joseph's hand. Shall close your eyes. That's a beautiful touch.

Israel. Jacob may have been afraid. That Joseph would die before him. What then would happen to him. Well God is saying to him. No that's not going to be the case. Joseph will be there.

When you come to die. That's what it's talking about. Closing his eyes. means. The time of Jacob's death. When somebody closes your eyes.

The eyes of your dead body. It's the last act. Pretty much. That's done for someone who's just passed away. And all of us I'm sure would want.

[33 : 20] Let that be done by someone dear to us. Wife. Husband. Child. Close friend.

Relative. Whoever. It's one of the most significant moments. In all our experience. When we come to die.

But actually. The most important thing for me. And for you when we die. Is not that a near relative. Or a loved one. Would be there to close our eyes.

But that the hand of Jesus. Would be upon us. Remember. Joseph. Represents. In so many ways. Jesus. Governing his people. And here is Jacob. His father. Being assured. When you come to die. In Egypt. It will be the governor of Egypt.

[34 : 19] Your son. Who will close your eyes. In death. What a great prospect. That is for you. And for me. Even. Though we are not wanting to happen.

Even if we die. Alone. Even if we are to die out in the wilderness. Somewhere with nobody near us. Or family or friends. If we die with the hand of Christ upon us.

All is well. Everything is then taken care of. Our Joseph. Our Lord Jesus.

If he closes our eyes. Well that is everything. Isn't it? And is that what he himself assures us.

As he said to his disciples. Before he left them. Assuring them that in his father's house. Were many mansions. Many dwelling places. That he was going to prepare.

[35 : 23] A place for them. If it were not so. I would have told you. But if I do go. I will come again.

And I will receive you unto myself. That where I am. There you. May be also. And that is the prospect.

Surely for you. And for me today. That you and I must make sure of. That this Jesus. Is looking after our life.

And our death. So that when we come. To whatever stage of life. Or death it may be. We are safe. In his hand.

Let's pray. Lord we thank you today. For the governorship. Which you occupy. Over all our lives.

[36 : 23] In particular. In the way. In which you exercise. That government. In the life of your people. We thank you today. For the prospect. Of having your company. And companionship.

Through life. Even as we experience it now. We pray for each of us here. Oh Lord. That this may truly be. Our life's experience. And we pray.

That when we come. Like Jacob. To have our eyes closed. And death. That we may know. Your own companionship then. Above all things. We pray that to secure it.

You would grant us the faith. That will come daily. To rest upon you. Hear us and accept us now.

Lord we pray. For your glory's sake. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.