

Outward Changes and Inward Change

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn to Genesis now, that passage we read, chapter 42 into chapter 43, from 42, verse 29, down as far as verse 14 of chapter 43.

Now, as we're looking at Joseph's life so far, one of the things we could say has characterized what we've seen or marked his life, you could say, is changes.

In fact, changes would really be a very apt title for the experiences of Joseph and his family as we've gone through the various incidents that are recorded here in the Bible about him.

We've seen that the many outward changes that Joseph experienced from being with his brothers to begin with in his own family house, then being sold into Egypt, the change in Egypt from being in prison for a time and then being suddenly exalted and elevated to be next to Pharaoh in the land and being in charge of the plans and the distribution of the grain during the time of famine.

So many changes, so many different circumstances and environments and conditions that came into Joseph's experience. And yet the one thing we saw, that throughout all of these changes, Joseph's character did not change.

[1 : 29] Joseph did not change from being the godly, committed, God-honoring man that he was. And it hasn't really mattered as we've seen Joseph's story so far.

It's no matter at all where you put him, whether it's in a prison or in a palace, Joseph is committed to honoring God. Nothing has changed in that respect, although a lot of changes have taken place outwardly in his life.

But it's not just about Joseph. As you go through the history of Joseph's life, you inevitably are drawn to consider the life of his brothers and his father as well.

And in that respect, the changes that have come into Joseph's life affect them as well. There have been many changes in the life of Jacob before Joseph was ever born and right through into Joseph's life and in the history of his brothers as well.

So many changes. But as you read through this history, the one thing you do want to happen is that these men will change.

[2 : 40] Because these brothers of Joseph, as we've seen, are a pretty dysfunctional lot. They're not very dependable. They are given to squabbling amongst each other.

They're given to excesses in lifestyle, doing things they ought not to do, sometimes pretty serious things. Their father couldn't depend on them.

And therefore, we know that this is one of the reasons he didn't want to send Benjamin down to Egypt now that Joseph has called for him. In other words, as you see the life of these men along with the life of Joseph, you don't want to see Joseph's character change.

But you do want to see the character of these other men change. And that is in fact what happens. Although they're all believers in the sense they believe in God, their life is not as committed to God or as godly a life or as God-honoring a life as that of Joseph.

In other words, what we're really looking at, whether you look at Joseph or you look at these brothers and his father, you're looking at the development of character.

[3 : 52] Character is important to everyone else. Even the youngest person here today, as well as the oldest, for them, character is important.

The development of your character. The development of what you are and who you are as a person. Character is very different from reputation.

You can have a reputation of being a very dependable person, of supporting your friends, but still not have a very acceptable character as far as God is concerned.

Our character is something that is so important and yet develops in the course of our life, in taking the experiences of life and especially looking at them in the light of scripture.

And that character develops. And indeed the Bible, as we mentioned in prayer, tells us that the character of God's people will in fact match up with Christ himself in his likeness perfectly.

[4 : 56] That is what our sanctification is about. Our being made holy means our being made like Christ. And our being made like Christ means or involves a willingness on our part to have our character developed in the way that God sees best.

And by the truth of God and through the events of our life. Today we're going to look at that in respect to Jacob. Because here there's a lot about Jacob in these two passages from 42 into 43. And we can very easily focus on him and come back to look at the other characters and figures in the passage later picking up Joseph himself.

But first of all the changes that Jacob had to face. Now one thing you know from reading through Genesis is that Jacob himself was something of a manipulator.

It came rather naturally to Jacob to actually control things so as to get the better of other people. He was quite skilled actually at getting the better of other people.

[6 : 11] He got the better of Esau's older brother in terms of taking the birthright from him. He got the better of Laban, his uncle. He got the better of many other people.

And in fact his name, Jacob, the supplanter, the one who trips people up, the one who gets one over others. That's really part of his natural character.

And that part of his character needed to change. And as you come to this stage of his life, now in old age, you begin to see that aspect of his character actually changing.

And in fact he can no longer use his own craftiness, his own ingenuity to get things to work his own way and to his own advantage.

Because it's now out of his control in that sense. Because he's forced into accepting that he cannot get grain for his family and keep Benjamin with him.

[7 : 10] You see, Jacob is at the stage of life where things are just beginning to run away from him. He's no longer able to control things himself the way that he once was.

And that's something that's always difficult for us to handle. It's something that will come the way of every single one of us the more life goes on. It's hard to accept the changes that time brings into our experience.

We all have changes to do with getting older. We have changes to do with our own physical abilities. And sometimes disabilities. We have changes to accept with regard to the way that our place in the world is different to what it once was.

We're not as able as we were when we were younger to do certain things along with other people. Changes come into our circumstances that we cannot control.

Changes that we have difficulty accepting. Changes that the providence of God, like in the case of Jacob, placed before him, put him into, and said, Well, Jacob, that's how it is with your life.

[8 : 24] Now you have to develop your character in these new sets of conditions. And it's so for every single one of us. Even the stages of children coming from one stage of education to another.

Coming from primary school, heading into secondary school. Coming to leave secondary school, going out into the world. Coming to take up a job or a position or a career. All of these things.

And then at the other end of the scale, you've got changes that come into our lives through retirement. Through our coming to the end of our working life. And sometimes these changes are more difficult than many others that we've faced in life.

That's how it is with Jacob. That's how it is with life itself. Jacob needs to accept that the changes that he's now facing are changes that he cannot himself control, but that he needs to make the best use of.

And that's how it is with our own lives too. It changes in personal life. Like we said, in our own physical and mental state.

[9 : 37] It changes in family life. Even the babies of families come to grow up to be adults if they're spared. And they come to take their own place in life.

And they come to take over from us. Who reared them? Who brought them up? Who looked after them? Difficult to handle these changes. We're left on our own sometimes at home.

Changes where people are taken from us. Sometimes against what we would desire. Changes in family circles. Changes in church life.

Changes that we perhaps did not anticipate. Changes perhaps we didn't agree with. Changes. But changes nevertheless that come in. That are inevitable. That are part of the progress of life

personally.

In family circles. In congregations. That's what you find here in Jacob and his family. They're having to deal with changes. They're having to meet with changes. They're having to face up to changes.

[10:39] They're having to adapt to changes. And especially they're having to develop their character under these changes. That's for you and for me today. What we must focus on from this particular study today.

How is my character developing as my life changes? How is my character developing as I'm getting older? Am I getting wiser? Am I getting more accepting of change?

Am I getting less selfish? Am I getting more loving of other people? Am I more accepting of other people's views?

Am I less insistent on having my own way? How am I coping with changes in my family? How am I coping with changes in the church?

With changes that perhaps are necessary for the advance of the gospel. And yet are different to what was in previous years. Changes.

[11:42] Inevitable changes. The changes in Jacob's life. But let's look at the change in Jacob himself. Because you can see to begin with he's just like the old Jacob.

In chapter 42 verse 36 there you can see his outburst there. When the brothers came back. His sons came back. And told them what had happened in Egypt. Jacob their father said to them. You have bereaved me of my children. Joseph is no more. And Simeon is no more. And now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me.

Or all these things are against me. Now that's not the outburst of an accepting. Quietly believing man of God. The first thing that really strikes you.

Apart from the fact that he's directing or venting. His frustration and his anger against his sons. And we've already seen the sons are not dependable people. They're sons that you just wouldn't want to give responsibility to.

[12:45] If it was something serious. And from that point of view. You can understand why he has this outburst. But nevertheless. Even accepting that. The one thing that's striking about what he says.

Is that there's no mention of God. It's all about himself. It's against his other sons. As they're standing before him. And telling about these things.

And it's all directed in on himself. You have done this. Why have you done this to me? And all these things are against me.

I'm being singled out. I'm the target. I'm under attack. Why me? Why have you done all this to me? It's a self-centered complaint.

If you go back to chapter 32. And verses 9 to 12. You can see the contrast with Jacob there. There were times of course when.

[13:45] Jacob in his life previously. Came out with wonderful expressions. Of faith. And of acceptance. Of commitment to God. But things come and go. In his life as in our own.

And Jacob said. O God of my father Abraham. And God of my father Isaac. O Lord who said to me. Return to your country and to your kindred. That I may do you good. I am not worthy.

Of the least of all the deeds. Of steadfast love. And all the faithfulness. That you have shown to your servant. For with only one my staff. I crossed this Jordan. And now I have become two camps. Please deliver me. From the hand of my brother. From the hand of Esau. For I fear him. That he may come and attack me. The mothers with the children. But you said. I will surely do you good. And make your offspring. As the sand of the sea. Which cannot be numbered for multitude. There is Jacob. In the brilliance of his faith. Committing his future to the Lord. Taking his fear to the Lord.

[14:44] Bringing the situation. The crisis. That's now in his life. When he is afraid that Esau will come against him. And overthrow him. And kill him. And actually devastate all that he has.

He commits himself to the Lord. He takes the Lord's promises from the past. And he says. Lord. I am now pleading on the basis of these promises. Please keep me. Please protect me.

You contrast that with. What he is now saying to his sons. You have bereaved me of my children. Joseph is no more. Simeon is no more. Now you would take Benjamin. All these things are against me.

A self-centered complaint. And indeed. In chapter 43. You find a very similar thing. In verse 6. There you find him still.

In the same vein. When the brothers said to him. Or Judah said to him. We can't go back to Egypt. Without Benjamin. Because that's what the man. That's what the governor of the land said.

[15 : 45] And Israel said. Why did you treat me so badly. As to tell the man that you had another brother. In other words. He is accusing them. Of having caused this again.

He is turned again in on himself. And against them. And all he can think of is. Why did you have to tell them. Tell him. About your younger brother. So you see the same.

Self-centered complaint. Now. You can understand that. From one point of view. As far as he is concerned. Joseph is dead.

And his remaining full brother. Benjamin. The youngest. He is now threatened with. Losing him as well. You can understand.

His frustration. His anxiety. His sense of. Really being singled out. As it were. For this sort of treatment.

[16 : 41] You can understand that. You can follow him. In his frustration. In his anxiety. In his fear. Of losing. This precious. Benjamin. Benjamin. But nevertheless.

He ought to have thought. Higher than he did. He ought to have had. His thoughts upon. God. Upon the overruling. Providence of God.

Upon the goodness. Of God to him. In the past. And how that was promised. Him. In his future. Including. These events. As well. Instead of being so.

Taken up. With himself. And the way. That all of these things. Were directed. Towards himself. Without much. Of any reference. To God at all. He's failed.

He's failed. To bring everything. To God. And under. His sovereign control. And to commit. All of this to him. And you know.

[17 : 43] That's what happens. It's a very useful exercise. To contrast. These verses. In chapter 42. Jacob's complaint. Especially all these things.

Are against me. Contrast that. With Romans 8.28. What does Romans 8.28 say? For we know. That all things. Work together. Work together. For good. To those who love. The Lord. To those who are the called. According to his purpose. It's very easy. To misuse that verse.

It's very easy. To actually think. That that verse. Is easy to accept. It is. When you're in circumstances. That don't really test. But when you are being tested.

It's not such an easy verse. To accept. And yet. Even the testings. It's such a magnificent. Truth. To go to. And it's such an opposite.

[18 : 41] Sentiment. Such a contrasting. Sentiment. To the sentiment. Of Jacob. There's no reference. To God. There's nothing. Like the idea. That all of these things. Are actually working.

Together. For his good. That the good things. In the past. And the difficult things. In his present. That they all come together. As God's plan. There's no reference. To God.

And that's what we lose sight of. When we ourselves. Are taken up. With ourselves. And with things being against us. And when we keep looking in. On ourselves.

And when the difficulties. And the trials of life. Make us to. Be like Jacob. A self-centered person. With this complaint. That everything is against us. Against me.

It's then that you lose sight of. All things working together. For good. To those who love the Lord. We have to put that first.

[19 : 40] And that's where our character develops. A self-centered complaint. But that gives way. To a God-centered.

Acceptance. If you go to. Chapter 43. And verses 11 to 14. There's a wonderful change in Jacob. That father Israel said to them.

After Judah having said. That it had to be this way. That they had to bring. Benjamin with them. Or else they couldn't go and face. The governor of the land again. They don't know of course.

That it is Joseph. And Judah pledges. That he will actually take. Be a pledge of safety. For Benjamin. For Benjamin. From my hand.

You shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you. And set him before you. Then let me bear the blame forever. Connotations of Jesus in that.

[20 : 35] Isn't there? Where Jesus took the place. And the blame. And the sin of his people. But that's something that.

In principle you see there. But it's really pretty much about. Jacob and Judah. Saying this to him. Then the father Israel said to them. If it must be so.

Then do this. And he told them to take down. A present to the man. And to take double. Their money with them. And take your brother. Also in verse 13.

And rise. Go again to the man. May God almighty. Grant you mercy. Before the man. And may send back your brother. Other brother and Benjamin. And as for me.

If I'm bereaved of my children. I am bereaved. And I notice the contrast. There's now a lot about God. In his self-centered complaint.

[21 : 30] There's no mention of God. It's all about himself. And things being against him. Now with his acceptance of the situation. With his acceptance of it. In terms of moving on with his life.

He's putting it into the hands of God. He's seeing it against the overarching. Sovereign providence and government of God. He's seeing that there's no way out of it.

But to accept it. And to move on with his life. He accepts. And he puts it into the hands of God. And acceptance.

Of God's will. Is one of the first things. In the development of our character. If you want your character. And I want my character to develop.

In the right way. In a way that God approves of. In the way that fits into the pattern. Of God's own truth. Then acceptance of the will of God. Is very much at the outset.

[22 : 28] As foundational to that. And so it is. As life goes on. The acceptance of God. As the governor of our lives. The acceptance of the lordship of Christ.

The acceptance of it. Not in theory. Not just as a theory. But as a. In practice. As the one. Whose lordship governs. Every aspect of your life. The way you think.

The way you think of yourself. The way you think of other people. The way you think of. The world in which you live. The way you think of. The things that are required of you to do. In terms of. Your life.

In church. And family. In private. And. That's what leads. Not just to. The development of character. But.

To the kind of mind. That Paul calls. The contented mind. We all want a mind. That's at peace. Don't we? Mind that's contented.

[23 : 22] How do you get. The contented mind. Well it doesn't. Doesn't come overnight. It's something that needs to. Be worked out. That's. Plain from the life. Of Paul himself. As well. But when he came.

To write to. The Philippian church. Remember in chapter 4. Of Philippians. That this is. How he put it. Verses 11 to. To 13 there. Not that I'm speaking.

Of being in need. For I have learned. In whatever situation. I am. To be content. I know how to be brought low. And I know how to abound.

In any and every circumstance. I have learned. The secret of facing. Plenty. And hunger. Abundance. And need. I can do all things. Through him.

Or through Christ. Who strengthens me. You could almost say. That is a summary. Of Joseph's life. And that's something. That you're now seeing. More and more. In the life of Jacob.

[24 : 16] His old father. And at this point. In his life. It's coming through. Very clearly. What he's now saying. I have learned. I have learned. How to be low.

I have learned. How to increase. I can do all things. Through Christ. Who strengthens me. And that's. The contented mind.

As he puts it. The mind that. Deals with selfishness. With self. Centered. Complaint. The mind that. Is turned.

Not in on itself. But outwards. Towards God. And an acceptance. Of God's plan. And of God's. Control. And of God's lordship. You know.

Sometimes. Our selfishness. Can. Disguise itself. As if it were. The opposite. Of itself. Two friends.

[25 : 10] In a restaurant. They both. Ordered the same dish. Same main course. Fish. Soul. It was. And when.

The waiter came with. It was all on one big. Platter. The two fish. One for each of them. Were on the. Platter. But one was quite a bit.

Bigger than the other. And when one of them. Took the initiative. And started serving out. The food. Putting it onto the plates. He gave. His friend.

Across the table. The small one. And he put the big one. On his own plate. And his friend. Said to him. Well you've really. Got a nerve. And he said. Why? What's the problem?

And he said. You've given me. The small fish. And you've kept. The big one. For yourself. And he said. Well how would you. Have done it? I said. If I was serving. I'd have given you.

[26 : 05] The big one. Well he says. What's the problem? I've got the big one. But you see. The friend. Who pretended. Not to be selfish.

Who pretended. Yes I would have given you. The big one. He was very miffed. That he didn't get it himself. At his. In the bottom of his heart. He was still being selfish.

And pretending. It was something else. That was generosity. That's how we are. Sometimes we can be. Like that. Even with God. Outwardly we might think.

And show. In our face. Or in our. Outward appearance. Or whatever. That yes we're quite happy. With things as they are. But deep down. Are we really. Reconciled to the will of God?

Are we really like Jacob. Complaining against God? All these things. Are against me? Or have we come like. He's now accepting. The situation.

[27 : 03] And moving on. And saying. Well. This is how my character. Must develop. I must accept. The things that God. Has brought into my lot. And when he comes to. To the final part.

Of verse 14 there. And as for me. If I'm bereaved. Of my children. I'm bereaved. Well first of all. You notice saying. May God almighty. Grant you mercy. Before the man. May he send back.

Your brother. Other brother. And Benjamin. And. It's interesting. And it's really significant. The title he gives there. To God. Is God almighty. El Shaddai.

In Hebrew. Way back in chapter. 17. We've come across. You come across that. In chapter 17. Where God. Deals with Abraham. And speaks to Abraham.

By way of. The covenant. That God. Is making with Abraham. For himself. And for his descendants. And that's how chapter 17. Begins. When Abraham. Was 99 years old.

[28 : 00] Remember. Jacob is old. At this time as well. The Lord. Appeared to Abraham. And said. I am. God almighty. I am. El Shaddai. Walk before me.

And be blameless. In other words. Jacob is using. This great name. That he knows. Belongs to God. The name that God. Spoke about. When he introduced himself.

There. At that point. In. Jacob's. Grandfather's life. It's been passed down. Of course. And as a believer. Jacob knows.

Who El Shaddai is. And what it means. And it's interesting. That. Well previously. In a self-centered complaint. There. Complained. There is no reference. To God. When he does come.

To speak of him. He's El Shaddai. He's God almighty. He's the governor. He's the one in charge. He's the Lord of my life. He's the Lord of the covenant.

[28 : 56] He's the one who's promised to stand. And that's what now Jacob's mind is set upon. You see how his character. Is now developing. How his acceptance. Comes to.

Bring God into it. And to speak of God. In this wonderful way. Then. He goes on to. Say. If I am bereaved of my children. I am bereaved.

And that's not despair. This is not Jacob coming to say. Well this is just how it has to be. I'm going to accept it. I can't do anything about it. I'm just going to throw my hands up.

And if that's how it is. Then that's how it is. Let's be done with it. Let's get on with it. It's not that at all. That would still be selfishness. This is a man who's now reconciled.

To God's charge of his life. And who's reconciled to the fact. That whatever the future holds. It's God's arrangement. It's God's plan. It's God's way of doing it.

[29 : 51] And God's way is best. And if it means I'm bereaved of my children. He's saying. Well that's it. Let it be so. I am bereaved. Imagine what that meant.

Anybody who's lost a loved one knows how difficult that is. But here is Jacob saying. Not only have I lost my beloved Joseph. It may be the case that I'll never see my sons again.

All of them. They're walking away from me. Into Egypt. And they're taking Benjamin with them. And I may never see them again.

Maybe this is the last sight I will ever have. Of my sons. And as they walk into the distance. Jacob's left with this great sentiment.

With this wonderful shining expression of faith. As for me. That's not now.

[30 : 57] All these things are against me. As for me. If I am bereaved of my children. If that's what God has in his plan for me. So be it.

I am bereaved. Already you can see his character. Has taken a huge shift forward. It's developed in a way that. Is more than ever reconciled to the will of God.

And to what God has. In his life. Z.S. Lewis wrote. In one of his many writings. In his own inimitable style.

This is how he put it. We'll finish with this quote. He says. It may be hard. For an egg. To turn into a bird. It would be a lot harder.

For it. To learn to fly. While remaining an egg. We are like eggs. At present. And you cannot go on. [32 : 00] Indefinitely being. Just an ordinary. Decent egg. We must be hatched. Or go bad. Okay.

Let me just read that again. It may be hard for an egg. To turn into a bird. That would be a jolly sight. Harder for it to learn. To fly. While remaining an egg. We are like eggs.

At present. And you cannot go on. Indefinitely being. Just an ordinary. Decent egg. We must be hatched. Or go bad. That's what an egg is like.

You leave it. It goes bad. You hatch it. It becomes a bird. Character. You leave it.

Unchecked. Undeveloped. Unshaped. Unshaped by God's truth. It goes bad. It becomes worse than it is. You develop it.

[33 : 02] You bring it under the teaching of God's word. You bring it under the acceptance of God's rule and God's lordship. It becomes like a bird.

It rises higher. Until it flies away. And it's like God himself. Let's pray. Lord our gracious God. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord our gracious God. Teach us. We pray. How our character must develop. How we as human beings develop.

Under the teaching of your word. Lord. We give thanks Lord for the effect of your word. When you bless it to us. When we seek it to be blessed in our experience.

We thank you for the prospect of developing in our character. Until more and more we are like our Lord himself. We thank you that that is the truth that you hold before your people.

[33 : 59] That that is what you have in your plan for them. That you will bring them at last to be so. Oh Lord make us willing we pray. For day by day you bring us into circumstances that test us.

That cause us to ask questions of ourselves. And we pray gracious Lord that you would help us. In the developing of our character. That we may do so in a way that honors you.

And gains an advantage ourselves. Hear us we pray for Jesus sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you for stay. Amen.

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

Amen. Amen.