

Trust God Almighty

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[0 : 00] Okay, thank you. With Genesis 48 open in front of us, I want to ask this morning, how can you face the future without fear?

! Fear is a very very powerful human feeling and many of us so much of the time are tangled balls of worry and anxiety. The tensions in our shoulders, the pressures in our dreams give the game away. We feel threatened by what might happen in the future and it's scary.

You can be big picture fearful about the future of the world. With the pandemic and lockdowns still scarring us, news drips into our smartphones minute by minute about the war in Ukraine and a climate emergency and overpopulation and raging inflation and fewer job prospects in an artificial intelligence world and so on and so on and so on.

It is no surprise that people in their teens and their twenties feel not just anxious and lost but doomed as they look to an unknown future. Alongside big picture fears for the world, we fear for our communities and our families.

We were cycling up the busway on Monday evening from down the other way and a woman coming the other way said, watch out, there's kids further up pulling people off their bikes close to Orchard Park.

[1 : 27] It's not nice that. You think when we go round this corner who will we come across and what will they do? It makes you nervous, worried. You fear for your family's future.

How will our kids cope in 20 years time with society going the way it is and they're a long way away in a strange city and I'm not tucking them in at night anymore? Or we think of our own personal futures and it can be hard not to feel scared about your faith, your health, your safety and ultimately your death itself.

I remember reading a newspaper article a while back, What I've learnt by Alex James, bass player with Blur. Growing your own food is fantastic, therapy can really work for men, etc, etc.

Last comment, I'm terrified of dying. Ask in a slightly different way. Can you imagine a life freed from fear?

Can you imagine how it would be if, with all the unknowns and the threats of the future looming for your world and your family and you, instead of being stressed and scared and unable to sleep, can you imagine if you had a solid, quiet confidence?

[2 : 46] Can you imagine how good that would be? How can you face the future without fear? We'll come to Genesis 48, this passage we've just read and Jacob.

Jacob, who is the grandson of Abraham. If you've been with us through these weeks, all the big action in the story of Joseph has happened. And at this point in the Bible, Jacob and the 70 members of his family are together in Egypt.

And having lived in Egypt for 17 years, we're told in chapter 47, verse 29, the time drew near for Israel, another name for Jacob, to die.

And Jacob calls Joseph to him and says, promise you'll be kind to me. And when I die, you will take my body and bury me with my fathers. And Joseph promises. And in verse 31, Israel worshipped God as he leaned on the top of his staff.

He's not terrified. He worships God. Well, sometime later, chapter 48, Joseph was told your father was ill. And so he took his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, along with him.

[3 : 59] And when Jacob was told your son, Joseph, has come to you, Israel rallied his strength and sat up on his bed. So chapters 48 and 49 of Genesis are Jacob's final word.

And they're uttered with the last of his strength from his deathbed. And as Jacob both prepares to die and looks to the future as well, and as he blesses and instructs his family, there is no paralyzing fear in him.

Rather, he is able to speak with confidence and certainty. He faces the future without fear. And that is because he has placed his trust in God Almighty.

This is the open secret, the open Bible secret, to facing the future fearlessly. You entrust your life, you entrust your family, you even entrust the future of the world into the hands of God Almighty. The message of today's sermon from Genesis 48, trust God Almighty, who cares for his people and delivers his people and grows his people.

[5 : 22] When you have him as your God, you do not need to fear for the future. Let's look at this together. In 48 verse 3, having rallied his strength, do you see how Jacob addresses Joseph?

God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and said to me, I'm going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers. I'll make you into a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.

Genesis is full of God's promises, and promises from God that find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who reigns over Jacob's descendants forever, who gathers around himself a community of people, the church, who will live in God's heavenly land forever.

And the reason Jacob builds his life confidently on these promises is because they come from the lips of God Almighty. Verse 3.

I've looked down at the start of verse 3, the very first words that he says, God Almighty. The title God Almighty, El Shaddai, it speaks particularly of God's overwhelming power and his might.

[6 : 48] We live in a society today where God can seem weightless and light, like fairies at the end of the garden. He's never mentioned, he's not needed, we've managed to chase him away.

God has become a niche belief for needy people. And if there is such a thing as a God, he's so quiet and so distant and so uninvolved, that really he's irrelevant to real life and our fears for the future.

Even amongst Christian believers. It's possible to spend a week talking about community and relationships and how we're doing and how we really need to help each other.

And sometimes we even forget to mention or consider him. But that is to lose sight of reality.

Genesis says that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The one who is eternal simply spoke this whole created order into being.

[7 : 54] And now today this sovereign Lord runs and rules over our creation in mighty power. He holds the stars in place today.

He shapes human history today. He gives each of us life and breath today. With not even a sparrow falling to the ground outside his care.

Because right now as we sit here today we are ruled over by God almighty. Overwhelmingly mighty and weighty and powerful and immense and sovereign over us and our lives.

And when this God who is there and is not silent and is not weak. When this God promises to bless. And when he promises in Genesis to give life in the womb and grow a people who will be his forever.

No one and nothing can stop him or constrain him. And Jacob says to Joseph God almighty appeared to me.

[9 : 04] Well the story rolls on as Jacob if you can picture him still sitting in up in bed and barely able to see. And he meets and he takes on his knees his two grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh.

And he kisses them and hugs them. Such a beautiful moment. I remember my grandma meeting Emily when Emily was six weeks old. And then she died just a couple of months later.

And I've got a picture of my granny with my little one. Such a precious moment. And now here Jacob places his hands on the heads of the grandsons.

And in verse 15 he blessed Joseph and he spoke. So picture him about to die. He knows he's about to die. His family is around him on the bed.

And again his words are so full of God. They're so full of God's character. And God's commitment. And they're words that are so full of the confidence that we too can have.

[10 : 07] As we know and walk with him. And focus in with me on these two verses. Chapter 48 verses 15 and 16. Look at them with me. And notice firstly that God Almighty cares for his people.

Jacob blessed Joseph and said. May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully. The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day.

A shepherd cares for his sheep. He's with them and knows them. He leads them and feeds them. He binds up their wounds and protects them. It's what a shepherd does.

And Jacob says. This is his testimony to us. God has been my shepherd. He's been a shepherd to me personally. And later in the Bible Psalm 23 says.

The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing. Jesus himself will declare. I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep. He knows his sheep individually and personally and by name.

[11:19] What Jacob's talking about here. And what followers of Jesus can know in their experience. Is utterly unique in world religions. The kind of modern day spirituality of Cambridge.

Riffing off Eastern mysticism. Has a kind of vague sense of the divine all around us and in us. But no personal care. You won't be cared for. In Islam he is mighty and superior and far off.

We say God is my shepherd. Personally walking with me. Not that life becomes easy though. As Jacob sums up his experience.

Just a page back in chapter 47 verse 9. Jacob said to Pharaoh. The years of my pilgrimage are 130. My years have been few and difficult. As he sums it up.

And they have for Jacob. If you followed the story through. His brothers wanted to kill him. His uncle tricked him into marriage. His wives competed over him. He was in great fear and distress.

[12:27] God bust his hip. And he limped through his life. His daughter was abused. His sons took revenge. He spent 20 years grieving for a son he thought was dead. He almost died of hunger.

His beloved wife Rachel. He was in sorrow as she died. And he buried her. His life was long few. Days few he said. But 130 years. And difficult.

And yet. Verse 15. God has been my shepherd. He's been with me. He has carried me through. All my life. To this day. Maybe you're here this morning at St John's. And you are kind of coming back to church.

Or you're here this morning. And you feel you're looking in on the Christian faith. And wanting to know more. None of us here is 147 years old.

[13:24] But some of us have had quite a lot of life to this day. And I want to say to you. You can feel free to ask people around you. Here. Is this just make believe stuff.

Saying God is my shepherd. You should ask people around you. And you will hear testimony after testimony. Of how the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who knows each of us by name. Has cared for us. In our lives. Noticeably. God Almighty first.

He cares for his people. When you stop and think about it. It should be mind blowing. Really.

Because he is El Shaddai. He is God Almighty. He is the unstopably powerful sovereign Lord.

Of history. And he who holds the stars in place. And shapes all things. Is my shepherd. That's mind blowing.

[14:24] What do you think? It should be pretty confidence giving. For your future. Don't you think? For Jacob on his deathbed.

Or for us. With that day ahead of us. In Psalm 23. King David says to his God and shepherd. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

I will fear no evil. For you are with me. Your rod and your staff. They comfort me. That is the Lord God Almighty.

The Lord of history. Is more than able to shepherd us. Even through death. And take us home to himself. And so I will not fear.

God Almighty cares for his people. Second. God Almighty delivers his people. In these verses. Verses 15 and 16.

[15:23] Not just my shepherd all my life to this day. End of verse 15. But now verse 16. The angel who has delivered me. From all harm. In Genesis.

When one of God's angel messengers speaks or delivers. It's God himself. Who is speaking. Or delivering. The word deliver. Or redeem. It means buying you out of trouble.

And rescuing you from distress. Or harm. And Jacob says. In my personal experience. God Almighty is my deliverer.

My redeemer. And God in his mighty power. Delivered Jacob from his brother's fury. And rescued him from his uncle's tricks. And saved him from the distress.

The distress of a split family. And a starving death. It didn't happen instantly for Jacob. Just like that. Jacob endured years of distress.

[16:21] But at the end of the day. God delivered me from all harm. He says. Of course he did. Because he is God Almighty.

As the Bible story moves forward. The Lord God delivers his people from slavery in Egypt. He redeems them. With a mighty arm and with mighty acts of judgment. And the ultimate act of redemption and deliverance. Takes place at the cross of Jesus Christ. Through which God once for all delivers people. From all the harm and the power. Of sin and Satan and death. And brings us into the kingdom of his son. And that is why many of us will be able to testify today. God has delivered me. And as a follower of Jesus Christ. I know the relief of my sins forgiven. I really do.

[17 : 26] I was once petrified of death. Now I'm freed. I was once trapped in harmful addiction. God is delivering me.

God is delivering me. Some of us will have very concrete and vivid stories to tell. Of how in the middle of trouble. God took hold of us and pulled us out. Others of us are still in the middle of it. And we're waiting and longing to be saved from harm. And we pray. How long Lord? How long? But we do not need to fear. Because we belong to God Almighty. And no one and nothing can stop him from keeping his promises and delivering his people.

This morning from these verses we're dipping in. We're sitting with Jacob on his deathbed. And we're asking. How can you face the future without fear? Your future. Your family's future.

[18 : 30] And Jacob about to die is full of God's character and commitment. Trust God Almighty who cares for his people.

Who delivers his people. And finally, who grows his people on whom he has set his love. And with Jacob's hands on his grandson's heads, let me read his prayer once more.

Verse 15. Verse 15. May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully. The God who's been my shepherd all my life to this day. The angel who's delivered me from harm. May he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac. And may they increase greatly on the earth.

May they be called by my father Abraham and Isaac. And back in verse 4, Jacob had recounted God's promise. I'm going to make you into a fruitful and increase your numbers people. I will make you into a community of peoples.

[19 : 31] It's a promise ultimately of a growing worldwide church of peoples from every nation. Who belong to Jesus Christ and enjoy the blessing of having God Almighty as their shepherd and deliverer and father.

It's a promise about us. And in verse 16, Jacob, knowing the track record and knowing the unstoppable power of God Almighty, confidently claims this promise for the children of Joseph. May they increase greatly on the earth. After which, through these two chapters, assuring Joseph that God will be with you.

And he blesses and instructs each of his sons in turn. And then finally, in chapter 49, verse 33. When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into his bed, breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

Secure in his own faith. Confident in the future of his family. And safe in the arms of his God. You know, when you become a Christian believer, you can still find yourself fearful as you think of the future.

[21 : 01] I well remember over ten years ago, sitting next to a Christian man who was 92, and he was on his deathbed. And as I held his hand, he cried and he cried.

And he said, Chris, I'm scared. I'm so scared. I'm so scared. And yet, at the same time, our God would grow in us a greater confidence in him.

The kind of confidence that Jacob has as he breathes his last hair. And this morning, at the end of July 2023, you've got to put your faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, you need to be part of this church of people who belong to God Almighty. This flock of people who sit under the care of a good shepherd.

And experience what it's like to have a shepherd and a deliverer and a father who is for you. And urge and pray for your family and your friends to entrust themselves to him.

[22 : 15] And as you do that, you can know that with all the unknowns and the threats of the future looming, El Shaddai, God Almighty, is with you.

He is with you. And with your hand in his, you have absolutely nothing to fear. You really don't.

Let me lead us in a prayer. Let's pray. We bow before you this morning.
God Almighty and Lord of all. You are sovereign God, immense and powerful and good.
You, the God who chooses to set your love on people such as us. Our Lord, thank you that you can
be our shepherd, my shepherd, our deliverer, my deliverer.
[23 : 25] And you promise that you will sustain and keep your people through life and through
death and into eternity. Please would you make us those who see you with the eyes of faith.
And may we entrust ourselves and all we are and all we love into your hands. And may you be our
God and shepherd us and deliver us and then take us home.
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.