

God's Loving Care in Jacob's Last Journey

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to the Word of God and read firstly Genesis chapter 46 and we'll read the first four verses of the chapter and then look at a few points as we find them in these verses.

Genesis chapter 46 and at the beginning. So Israel, that's of course Jacob, took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, here am I. Then he said, I am God, the God of your father.

Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt and I will also bring you up again.

And Joseph's hand shall close your eyes. This is a very critical moment in the experience of Jacob now in his old age.

[1 : 11] He has to leave the place that he's familiar with. Not only that, but he has to go down to Egypt of all places. And it's also a critical stage for Israel.

He's called Israel because the people, of course, that would come from him would come to be known as the nation or the people of Israel. And it's a critical moment in the experience of Jacob, the family of Jacob, the descendants of Jacob.

Because going down to Egypt is going down to a land associated with pagan darkness. And it's going to be a land in which they are going to be afflicted.

And especially the way that God had said to Abraham that his descendants would go to live for 400 years to be afflicted in a land other than their own.

And afterwards they would come out again. So Jacob, understandably, had some anxiety in thinking of uprooting from where he was and going to Egypt, knowing something of what God had said regarding the future of the people.

[2 : 35] He needed reassurance. Even he, at that stage of his life, as an old believer, needed God's hand to steady his life.

He had many reasons to be anxious, as we also do even today. Believers need assurance too.

We are all human beings. And faith does not remove from us the need for that reassurance. And the need for reassurance does not remove from us the conviction that we do have faith.

The fact that we need strengthening, that we need reassurance, is not evidence that we don't have faith. Just that we need to be strengthened under it.

We need to be strengthened under it. We need to be strengthened under it. And we need to be strengthened under it. Jakob made his way and stopped at Beersheba. And that too is significant. Beersheba was a place associated with his father, a place associated with his grandfather.

- [3 : 46] It was a place associated with worship of the living God. It was a place where sacrifices had been offered many times before.
- And here again we find Jacob, as he came to Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. That's important for us too.
- You may reflect and recall that in our New Year's Day service and in our New Year's Day sermon, I refer to the fact that we bring our concerns and our struggles to the worship of God.
- A word something like, our struggling hearts need worship, need to worship, need to be worshipping.
- And that's where we are today as we think of these words about Jacob. When he came to Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father. So he was on this difficult journey, though this had surprised him, I'm sure, in many ways.
- [5 : 02] Not least that he knew now that Joseph was actually alive. Yet he comes to worship God. He follows his usual practice. He comes to stop at Beersheba and offer sacrifices to God.
- And there God met with him in the visions of the night. God came to speak to him there at that moment. To reassure him further that when he was on his way to Egypt, he need not fear to go further and go into Egypt itself.
- So there are four things today that we can take from this to our own circumstances. And we trust that God will bless that to us. And that we too, like Jacob, will be reassured of our relationship with God.
- First of all, God said to him, I am God. Just these words. I am God. And the word that's used in the Hebrew of the Old Testament is el, the word el for God.
- I am el, which means usually in the Old Testament, the emphasis in that word for God is an emphasis on might and on sovereignty and on ability and strength.
- [6 : 16] I am God. What a great thing for God to come to Jacob or Jacob to hear God at that time saying, I am the Almighty One. I am God.
- I am el. I am the one who is Almighty. Jacob, Egypt actually belongs to me too. Egypt is under my sovereignty. Egypt is something that I control just as much as Canaan, just as much as the route from Canaan to Egypt.
- I am God. And that's what we need to hear today for our burdened hearts. I am God. God does not make mistakes.
- God in the jigsaw, as we said to the children of our lives personally, of his church overall, knows where all the pieces fit in. And however difficult it is for us to actually see where certain pieces fit into the jigsaw, however difficult it is for us to shape, to match the shape of them into the rest of the jigsaw, that we are more familiar with, God is saying to us today, friends, I am God.
- I am el. I am the Almighty One. Take that as I must do into the days ahead.
- [7 : 33] Whatever it is that's required of us, whatever changes take place in our experience, this is something that is constant. I am God.
- He will never be anyone else other than God. He will never be anything other than God to his people. He will never be other than sovereign. He will never be other than worthy of our praise.
- He will never be other than the one who presides over all the events of history from beginning to end. I, I am God.
- Remember when we can't expand our understanding sufficiently to cover all the things that happen in the course of our life's experience.

Remember when you are struggling to try and understand how the pieces of your own personal life fit together. Remember when you are struggling for meaning in the things of your own life from time to time.

[8 : 31] Remember who is God. Remember that He is the one who has patterned out your life, who presides over your life, who has every aspect of your life in His own perfect control.

I am God. And then He said, Secondly, I am the God of your Father.

I am God. I am the God of your Father. And you notice how personally God is speaking to Jacob. Jacob, Jacob, He said, as He called him by name.

He didn't call him Israel. He called him Jacob. Maybe there's a hint in that for us, that God was revealing to Jacob even through that, that He knew of his weakness, of his frailty, of his humanness, of the things that were making him anxious at this time.

I know you, He's saying. I know your name. I've got my finger upon your name. I know your circumstances. Jacob, Jacob. And so He is for you too.

[9 : 44] I am the God of your Father. In other words, He's revealing to Jacob something very, very precious. That as He was with His Father, so He would be with him.

That as He was with His grandfather, so He would be with him. In other words, God is saying, not only I am God, I am the sovereign one, I am the mighty one, I am the all-powerful one, but I am also the God of personal covenant.

I am the God who enters into relationship with people. And I am committed to that relationship. And I will never be diverted from that relationship. And I will never be diverted from my purpose in that relationship.

I am not only God, but I am the God of the covenant. I am the God of promises. I am the God who keeps my promises. I am the God of truth. I am the God of your Father.

The God your Father worshipped. The same God. I am still the God I was when your Father worshipped me, when your Grandfather worshipped me, when I spoke to your Grandfather Abraham and told him of what his life would be about, of what his descendants would become.

[10 : 57] I am that God. I am sending you to Egypt, not because I have changed, but because it's part of my purpose and part of my plan and part of my covenant dealings with you and with your descendants.

And how thankful we are today, surely, amongst all the upheavals of life and the uncertainties of life, that we have a God who is in covenant with his people and that in covenant with his people, God is absolutely committed to finish what he began, absolutely committed to look after all who trust in him, absolutely committed, as we'll see, to go with them in every step of their journey, absolutely committed to bring his covenant to fruition in the life and the salvation of his people.

I am God. And even more precious, I am the God of your Father. Father, we worship today as a congregation in 2017.

It doesn't matter how far back you go in the history of this congregation or previous congregations, we come to the same God.

He's the God of our fathers. He's the God who hasn't changed since then because he's been the same from all eternity. What does that say to you today?

[12 : 42] Well, it says not only is he committed to his covenant, to his relationship with his people, but it means he's absolutely dependable, absolutely dependable.

However difficult at times it is for us to accept his will, however difficult at times it may be to step into pulpits and seek to preach the gospel, one thing we can say for sure, God is absolutely dependable.

He will never fail you. He will never give up on you. He will see it through. I am the God of your Father.

And thirdly, I will go with you into Egypt. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you a great nation.

I myself will go with you. Isn't that an amazing promise and an amazing truth for Jacob at this time, as he needs such reassurance, as he's dealing with the prospect of going down to Egypt with all his family, with all that he has, to transfer them from the comfort that he had in Canaan down to Egypt where uncertainty faces him, where he knows that God has revealed his descendants will be afflicted for all of these years, for 400 years.

[14 : 16] No wonder he's anxious. No wonder even as an aged, mature believer that he's still filled with anxiety. God is saying, not only, I am God, and I'm the God of your Father, but he's saying, I do not be afraid, for there I will make you into a great nation.

There I will make you into a great nation. Not anywhere else. Not in Canaan, but in Egypt.

In the middle of Egypt's darkness. Under Egypt's oppression and cruelty and persecution. For all of these hundred years, hundreds of years that his descendants were in Egypt, that he is now beginning with his journey to Egypt.

What is God doing? He is making them a great nation. God knew how they'd be treated.

God knew the darkness that lay ahead of them. God knew the trials and afflictions that awaited him and his descendants especially. And the very last place and the very conditions that would lead you to expect something completely different to what's here.

[15 : 47] In other words, Egypt would be the last place you would expect the people of God to prosper in. And as you look over the world today and find Christians beheaded for what they believe and confess, you would say to yourself, that's the last place in the world where Christians could survive and especially where Christians could grow and where the church of God would be strengthened and where the church of God would grow.

It's not the case. There I will make you a great nation. Don't be afraid to go down there. You're not going to actually disappear as a people when you go into Egypt.

The darkness of Egypt is not going to cause that you'll be annihilated, that you'll disappear, that you'll go off the face of a map of the earth. There I will make you a great nation.

The work of God is not going to be thwarted or set back by what Egypt is going to do to these people. It is there that they're going to increase.

It's there that they're going to be made a great nation by God blessing them. And you know that applies to our afflictions as well.

[17 : 12] It may be surprising, at least at first on our Christian journey, and it's surprising perhaps to those who don't have faith at all, that under afflictions, Christians actually prosper.

that God does great things in their experience even there. 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 16 to 18.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen.

For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are unseen are eternal. There I will make you a great nation.

1 Peter chapter 5 verse 10. The God of all grace, after you have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish you, strengthen you.

[18 : 30] The God of all grace, after you have suffered a while, that's what Jacob's being told. Don't be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you a great nation. Today, as our hearts struggle with the providence of God, as our hearts find pain with the providence of God, as we reflect, many of you, if not most of you, if not all of you, reflect on other aspects of your experience in the past, where you struggled and maybe still struggle from that with the providence of God, with the afflictions, with the pains, with the difficulties, the trials, the changes in your experience of life.

Bear this in mind as much as you can. Believe this with all your heart. There, God is at work.

There I will make you a great nation. There God is molding and shaping and sanctifying his people, making them into a great nation in Egypt.

The God of all grace, the God of the covenant. See, that's what he's saying. I am God. I am the God of your Father. There I will make you a great nation.

And he doesn't finish even with that. I myself will go down with you to Egypt. I am God. I am the God of your Father. Now, Jacob, I am going to go with you into Egypt.

[20 : 01] What a wonderful, wonderful promise and what a wonderful truth. He's not simply saying to Jacob, I am God as I've always been. I'm still the God of the covenant. I'm the God of your Father.

and in Egypt, I'm going to make you and your people a great nation. They will prosper there despite the affliction and the darkness and the difficulties. But that's as far as I'm going.

I myself will go down with you to Egypt. Where would we be today if God didn't accompany us on the most difficult parts of our journey?

If God himself had not said, I'm going to go with you into Egypt because God is in Egypt.

God is in the affliction. God is in the darkness. And that's what he's telling us today and assuring us. I myself will go with you.

[21 : 01] I'm not simply going to take you to the border and then leave you there. I'm not going to give you all of this advice and all of these promises and take you just to the extremity and then you yourself are then to make your way.

I will go with you into Egypt. Isaiah chapter 63 has a wonderful emphasis that we know is fulfilled particularly in Jesus and in his relationship with his people.

Isaiah 63 and at verse 9 and verse 8 we read, Surely they are my people. Children who will not deal falsely and he became their saviour.

In all their affliction he was afflicted and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and his pity he redeemed them.

He lifted them up and carried them as in the days of old. In all their affliction he was afflicted. You see, God enters into the affliction with us.

[22 : 14] He experiences that and Jesus Christ he's done it preeminently in him. Which is why you find especially in the likes of the letter to the Hebrews where all these passages are, as they're slotted in alongside the great teachings about Christ's priesthood and Christ's person, you find such passages as come to be really encouraging passages to us informing us about the fact that Jesus as our high priest is not isolated from us.

He doesn't just shout encouragement from a far distance from the touchline as it were. He's actually there with us playing the game in the midst of the circumstances of our life.

For as much as as it says in Hebrews 2 for as much as he himself has suffered in being tempted he is able to succor to lend support to those who are being tempted.

You see Christ's strengthening of our hearts did not come by him coming near to our condition. By coming near to our affliction and looking on from a distance as to what they were like.

And Christ's support of us and Christ's involvement in our lives is not merely one whereas God he's saying I'm God I know all things of course he does. But he can see things now from inside the afflictions from having gone down into Egypt from having lived there and experienced that and from having come even to death itself.

[23 : 54] the cross forever bears testimony to God going down to Egypt with his people. He died for them in the person of Jesus' son.

He didn't just come and say I know you have to die and I'm going to take you as far as I can and I'll take you right to the very borders of death but death is something that I as God couldn't possibly go into not even for my beloved people.

No you read in John's gospel when Jesus died and they came to that sepulchre where nobody had ever been buried before there they laid Jesus therefore there they laid Jesus yes it's his body it's just his body it's his remains you might say as we speak it's the same for Christ when he died his body remained in this world and was buried it's his body but it's his body that's the body of the son of God that's the body of the God who's gone down to Egypt to the Egypt of death with his people so that when you and I look into the grave today and into the reality of death hard though it is and when the tears run down your face and you say Lord I don't understand but I'm so thankful that you know what the grave is that your footprints are there that you invite me today through the gospel to say as the angel said to the women he is not here he is risen come and see the place where the

Lord lay I will go with you into Egypt and then he went further still and I will also bring you up again that's the fourth point I am God I am the God of your father secondly I will go with you into Egypt thirdly and I will bring you up again in other words he's saying to Jacob you have to go down to Egypt I'm going to go down with you there your people will become a great nation but I'm not going to leave you there I will bring you up again Egypt is not going to be your resting place I'll bring you back to the land of promise and so it was after Jacob died his sons carried him back to Canaan and buried him in the land of promise and so it is for God's people because this is the language of resurrection no less and where

God is saying to us today yes you will go to Egypt you'll have difficulties you'll have trials you'll have afflictions you'll have unexpected events that you yourself could never cope with without me but I'm going to go with you and I'll be there with you and yes you'll have to go down into death but I've been there before you and not only that I'm not going to leave you there death is not your master I am I will bring you up again ultimately it's not enough for God that he went to the grave in the person of his son he also had to come back up again in the resurrection of Christ and so in the resurrection also of his people the last word for God's people is not with affliction it's not with Egypt it's not with death it's with life it's with the land flowing with milk and honey it's with glory it's with being with

[28 : 19] Christ Christ and so Jesus himself said in John chapter 6 this is the will of my father that whoever sees the son and believes in him may have eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day friends today death has invaded our thoughts our experience our life and of course it's unavoidable not only ours but the lives and experiences of many others whose lives Dr.

Campbell touched but today we leave this place yes with death still in our minds but above that with life I will bring you up again I will not leave you in death and then he finishes with very touching words Joseph's hand shall close your eyes Jacob had said earlier on when the news was brought to him by Joseph's brothers falsely presenting the cause of his death to his father that a wild beast had killed him they had threw the blood of a goat onto his coat that Jacob had made for him and Jacob had concluded this I'm never going to see my son again and what he said was I shall go down to the grave mourning for my son well he was wrong not wrong to mourn that's what he believed at the time but wrong because God was going to bring

Joseph to be present when Jacob died and it would be no other than Joseph who would close the eyes of the dead Jacob when he had expired Joseph Joseph's hand shall close your eyes and that's really an image of a greater Joseph is it not what happens when we come to die through faith in Christ who comes to close our eyes well in the physical sense somebody from our loved ones we hope will be there just to close our eyes physically in death but above that spiritually Jesus himself will be there for his people and when the time comes for those who love him and who have been loved by him to die this is in fact what happens maybe nobody sees it happening but in the spiritual sense this is how it is

Jesus comes and says I'm now going to close your eyes this is the end of your journey in this life your afflictions are over your pain is no more I'm coming for you and you shall live with me forever may that be the hope of every one of us here today may this tragedy that has happened over these days may it be blessed to me and blessed to you to the extent that our trust will be in Jesus and that as our faith is in him so we'll know that God is our God the God of our Father the God who will go with us into death the God who will not leave us there but bring us into the fullness of life that is with himself in heaven let's pray we give thanks oh Lord today for your upholding for your strengthening we give thanks that you are

God and there's none beside you we give thanks that you are our covenant God whose promises will always be fulfilled we give thanks that you travel with your people as their great companion through life and into death we bless you that your promises you would never leave or forsake your people and we know that your promises are true we pray Lord that you would also make us thankful for your victory over death for there you will not leave your people but you will raise them up to be with you at the last day bless to us your word for Jesus sake amen we're going to conclude our worship today now singing in Psalm 23 Psalm 23 from the Scottish Psalter the tune is Aaron we'll sing the whole Psalm on page 229 the Lord's my shepherd

[33 : 58] I'll not want he makes me down to lie in pastures green he leadeth me the quiet waters by the whole of the Psalm Psalm 23 to God's praise the Lord's my shepherd I'll not want he makes me down to lie in pastures green he he loved me the quiet waters by my soul he doth restore again and me to all

God may alive he within the paths of righteousness if Jupiter moved su ■■■■■■■■ estre for his hope lived same If the rise I walk in desert field, yet will I fear not live.

For thou art with me at thy road, and shall be gone for still.

My dear love, thou spurnish it, in presence of my foes.

My heaven, thou dost with oil anoint, and mine, thou bowed her close.

[36 : 39] Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me.

And in God's hands forevermore, my dwelling grace shall be.

If you let me get to the main door, please, after the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

Amen.