

Nothing But the Best for God's People

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Date: 26 February 2017

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] Let's turn back to the passage now we read from the scriptures, Genesis chapter 46 to 47. We're reading through into 47 and especially chapter 47 verses 7 to 12.

Then Joseph brought in Jacob his father and stood in before Pharaoh and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Jacob, how many are the days of the years of your life? Jacob said to Pharaoh, the days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years.

Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been. And they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh.

Reunions are usually very emotional events. Most of us have probably been involved in school reunions. And they can be quite emotional when you come to see people you haven't seen, possibly even since school days.

Depends how old you are, of course, and how many years have elapsed. And the emotion is heightened when sometimes at such reunions we realize that some are no longer in this world that we shared school life and life in our youth with.

[1 : 2 0] And every type of reunion has its own emotional content. You find that people waiting in the ferry terminal for loved ones coming off the ferry. Airports have the same kind of situation.

People are waiting for loved ones. Possibly they haven't seen them for a long time. And you can see the emotion as they meet and greet each other and as they hug and welcome each other and meet together for the first time in maybe many years.

And these passages in Genesis are filled with that sort of emotion. Chapter 45 is one of the most emotional passages in the Bible, as you read it, because that's when Joseph made himself known to his brothers who had come down to Egypt.

He had recognized them after many, many years separated from them. They thought he was dead. Their father thought he was dead. And there they are now coming to meet him.

And he reveals himself to them. They weep profusely, even though they have an element of fear as well. And now in this chapter, 46 into 47, you have the account of Joseph meeting again with his aged father, Jacob.

[2 : 3 8] The father who thought he had been dead for many years. The father who had said when he was receiving news of his apparent death from his brothers, who had, of course, treated him so badly, that he would go down sorrowing to the grave.

Joseph, my son, is dead. But he wasn't. He was, in fact, now under Pharaoh, the most important man in the world. He was the ruler of Egypt as Pharaoh's representative, carrying out the government of Egypt and presiding over the government of Egypt.

And as you find an account of his meeting here with his father, Jacob, and how they met with Pharaoh, it's all inside something that these chapters and indeed the whole book of Genesis is really telling us about.

And it's God's grand plan for his people. As the story moves on through Genesis, you see how it comes from the promises made to Abraham, then to Isaac, and to Jacob, and now his sons and his family.

And they're going to be settled in Egypt, and they're going to be 400 years in Egypt, and they're going to be abused eventually in Egypt. They were going to become slaves in Egypt. But it's all part of God's great plan in moving things on for the benefit of his covenant people until they finally are in the land of Canaan.

[4 : 01] They're going to leave Egypt. They're going to walk with God through the desert for 40 years. God is going to take them to the place that he promised they would inhabit, the land that flows with milk and honey.

And as you see, Joseph, in this part of that great plan, you can see some aspect of the way that he governs and the way he makes arrangements that remind us of the government of Jesus Christ, the head of his church, as he has made and is making arrangements for his people down through history right up to our own day.

So two things from the passage we're going to look at, and a number of points under each of those. First of all, the position of Joseph's people, as you find them described here, coming into Egypt, his brothers and his father.

And secondly, the providence of Joseph's God. The position of Joseph's people and the providence of Joseph's God.

The position they have is that they are settling in this region of Goshen, which is a part of Egypt. And it's interesting how we're told how they went about settling there.

[5 : 15] Joseph made these arrangements for them. And as he made these arrangements for them, he very carefully dealt with how the news was presented to Pharaoh so that it would be to their advantage, but indeed to the Egyptians' advantage as well.

Because as they went to settle in Goshen, that ensured that they were kept separate from the Egyptians, from the practices of the Egyptians, from the paganism of the Egyptians.

And the separation of Joseph's family and their descendants in the land and the region of Goshen from the people of Egypt is an important theological statement, because that's where they kept and maintained their identity.

That's where they kept their worship, their relationship with their God. That's where they actually were able to be in separation from the Egyptians, following the ways of their God.

It was an advantage to them that they had that separation because they were able, therefore, to be the people of the covenant and of God in the land of Goshen.

[6 : 23] And Goshen, incidentally, in Hebrew means light. And you can see the identity, therefore, of these people is preserved. It's looked after. It's followed through in the way that they settle and come for years to live in the land of Goshen.

You can see, in fact, that principle of separation or of the identity of these people, even in the likes of the ten plagues that are described later in the book of Exodus, when God brought the ten plagues, culminating in the plague of the death of the firstborn, which prompted Pharaoh finally to give his command that these people would leave Egypt.

When it was dark, for example, in the plague of darkness, the whole region of Egypt was in thick darkness, but the land of Goshen, the land of the light, the people of Israel had light in their dwelling places.

When it came to that final destructive plague, the plague of the death of the firstborn, the firstborn of Egypt, of every house in Egypt, was dead in these households.

And in the households of Israel, that death of the firstborn didn't touch them, because there was another death there protecting them, the death of the sacrificial lamb, the Passover lamb, whose blood had been sprinkled on the doorposts and the lintels of the doors.

[7 : 52] And when God saw the blood, he passed by. The angel of death did not touch them. These people were separate. They were looked after by God. They were distinct. They were precious to God. They were his covenant people.

They were, in their own identity, the people of God. And there are two points we can make from that. First of all, God's people today are distinct, and we have to maintain that distinctness.

We need to maintain that distinctness in the ways in which we find the Bible speaking about how we serve the Lord, how we show our distinctness, how we witness to God in our society today.

The distinctness of God's people is not made up simply by them being very negative about everything and going about with long faces. Their distinctness is actually inclusive of the joy that they have in the Lord, of the confidence they have in the Lord.

Sometimes that can come and go and wane and rise and fall, but nevertheless, God's people are a distinct people. And in fact, as you read in 1 Peter, Peter building on the Old Testament words of the likes of Genesis itself and the words of Moses elsewhere, you remember in chapter 2 of 1 Peter, he actually says there in verses 9 and 10 that you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[9 : 32] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. They have been formed into a people. They are distinct people. We have to be careful to maintain that distinctness.

The line between God's people and those who are not God's people does not become blurred in the way we live our lives, in our attitudes, in our actions, in our words, in our conversations, in our practices, in what we do on the Lord's day, in all the things that the Bible tells us are important and distinguishing for God's people.

We maintain that precious distinctness because it's something that God has actually created and given to us. And the second thing that's important in regard to that identity is that we have to insist as Christians that we have the same rights accorded to us in society and the same liberties as are accorded to other groups and other people who are not Christians.

because increasingly in our world, our Christian voice is sidelined. Our Christian voice, in many ways, is something that attempts are made to silence.

Our Christian witness to the Lord's day, to the gospel, to salvation in Christ as the exclusive saviour of sinners. All of these things are being threatened. The darkness of secularism is closing in on them and it has all kinds of practical results as well, even in local issues.

[11 : 12] And we have to insist that Christians must have the same liberties of speech and of conscience as every other group if we are indeed to know of true equality and liberty.

So that's their identity. They're separate and they maintain their separateness and indeed one of the reasons that Joseph said to them to tell Pharaoh that they were keepers of livestock, the end of chapter 46, there is an interesting verse, because every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.

And when Joseph, when Pharaoh came to speak to them and asked them what they did, he said, well, if any of them are able, put them in charge of my livestock. Now, why is all that there?

Why does it say that every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians? What it really means is that they didn't think it proper for themselves as Egyptians to look after cattle.

They got other people to do that. If they could, they got other people who were not Egyptians to do this kind of work. They looked at this kind of work as something beneath them. And you see, the advantage that was to these people of Israel, these children of Jacob, this family of Jacob, because they were shepherds and had livestock, the Egyptians were actually very glad when they heard that.

[12 : 34] And they said, well, we'll give them this land of Goshen. It's perfect for their livestock. They can look after them there and they'll be separate from us and we won't have to deal with this issue. And indeed, our own livestock too.

Some of them can go in charge of that for us too. You see, God is going before them. And God is preparing even to that extent for his people to have the very best of the land.

The very best of the land is how Pharaoh himself described it. Let them have the very best. And that's the title of our study today. Nothing but the best as far as God is concerned.

Nothing but the best will do for the people of God. So their position is one of identity, separateness. They are the people of God.

Secondly, in the position that they have, you can see that they are unified now together as a family. Previously, they had been separate, Joseph, from the rest of the family.

[13 : 34] And here, Jacob himself is now coming down to Egypt. We saw last time, in fact, in chapter 46, how God encouraged and God strengthened Jacob for this journey into Egypt, assuring him that he would go down with him, that he would be there, that that would be where he would make him a great nation and God would actually come back with him and he would take him back from there.

Now he's settling him so that that promise will eventually be fulfilled. But here's the unity and you can see in chapter 46, very interestingly, how there's a list of names there.

Those that came down, the names of the descendants of Israel from verse 8 there, who came to Egypt, Jacob and his sons. And then you've got this list of names. And sometimes, as we said, on other occasions, you skip over these passages maybe or you're tempted to skip over them and really just miss them out and move on in your reading of the Bible.

But all these passages with these lists of names are themselves important. They've got something to do with the meaning of the passage in some way and you've got to study it and try and find out what it is.

And here, what it's really saying to us is, here's the entirety of God's covenant people as they are then and they're all together here. They're unified under Jacob, their father, as a people with all their possessions in the land of Canaan.

[14 : 57] And of course, that's such an important issue in the New Testament as it widens out the importance of the unity of God's people together as they're joined together in Christ and as they're joined to Him and as they're joined to one another.

It really brings such an important emphasis into our thoughts of what the church is, what the church should be like, what the church should be doing. And if you go to Ephesians, for example, you can read the passage through later.

We won't read it through just now, but the last part of Ephesians chapter 4 is really all to do with the unity of God's people and how that unity is provided for by God.

He calls it the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace and that we are charged, in fact, to maintain that. Civil war is always damaging. It's always a horrible thing.

When any nation has groups that come to war against each other, it's happened in our own nation in history. It's going on in parts of the world like South Sudan right now.

[16 : 06] But it's equally, if not more, destructive in God's church and God's people. We know what that does. We know what damage that causes.

When instead of maintaining their unity, the Lord's people are set against one another. Not just within one denomination, but even between denominations.

The Lord's people are one. Whatever denomination they belong to, whatever difference in some practices they may have, we're reminded again and again in Scripture in different ways of the importance of that unity of God's people.

And that unity here is, in principle, seen in Joseph and his brothers and his father settling together in this region of Goshen. So there's their unity.

We'll leave it at that in the unity. But there's thirdly, what we can call their superiority. Because as we read there in chapter 47 and verse 7, Joseph brought Jacob in before Pharaoh and stood him before Pharaoh.

[17 : 13] And then you find something remarkable mentioned twice. Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Read that again. Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

Who's Pharaoh? Pharaoh. Pharaoh was the most powerful man in the world at the time. Far more powerful than Donald Trump or Putin is today, though they have power politically.

This man is the most important in terms of power and government in the whole world of the time. The Pharaoh of Egypt, who has most of the known world at the time under his sway, who can command what he likes and it has to be done.

And yet here's this old man slowly making his way in to the presence of Pharaoh. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

What is that saying to us? It's saying to us that even in the presence of the most important man politically in the world, the Lord's people have an ascendancy.

[18 : 18] The Lord's people have a superiority that's given to them by God. Not a superiority where they can say, I'm better than you are. I'm going to look down my nose at you.

That's not the kind of superiority it is. It's actually a superiority that makes you feel incredibly humble and should actually humble us. It's a superiority that's given by the grace of God.

That's given by bestowing salvation upon us. By elevating us in Christ to a level that others don't enjoy. That's the kind of thing it is.

And here is this old man, this old believer, this aged Jacob who's been through so much in his life who may not appear anything compared to the grand figure of Pharaoh and yet it is Jacob who blesses Pharaoh.

by God's endowment of him spiritually, he's at a higher level than Pharaoh because God has blessed him and has made him a blessing to others and he pronounces this blessing over Pharaoh, the governor you might say of the world.

[19 : 28] And you can see it also in the plan that Joseph made for the people of Egypt, for Pharaoh's people.

And the rest of the chapter deals with Joseph's plan regarding the famine because the people in Egypt began to be in real need and so they came to Joseph who gathered all the money that was found in Egypt in exchange for the grain that they bought.

And when the money was spent then they had to come again and say, give us food. Why should we die before you rise for all our money is gone? So Joseph said, well, give us your livestock and I'll give you food in exchange for your livestock.

So he did. He supplied them with food in exchange for their livestock. And then when that year was ended they came the following and said, we'll not hide from my Lord that all our money is spent. The herds of the livestock are my Lord's.

There's nothing left in the sight of my Lord but our bodies and our land. So Joseph said, well, I'll buy all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh and you can become his servants.

[20 : 34] And that's what they did in verse 23. Behold, I have today bought you and your land for Pharaoh. Now here is seed for you and you shall sow the land. And verse 25, they said, you have saved our lives.

May it please my Lord. We will be servants to Pharaoh. And you see, all of that stands in between and in a passage dealing with God and his people. Because while all of this is true about the Egyptians and they're facing this situation and Joseph makes these arrangements for him, who is Joseph?

He's one of God's people. And his own people are in the best of the land in the land of Goshen. They have that superiority, that elevation of blessing above the people of Egypt itself.

And that's what grace does to you. Grace gives you a certain dignity, a certain status, which God is pleased to give to you as a Christian. Nobody can rob you of that.

People can denigrate it. People can say it's not true. It's just your imagination. But it's not. Just as we read in 1 Peter, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a chosen nation, a nation of people who are special to God.

[21 : 52] That's how he's describing the people of God. That's not so that they'll feel proud about it. It's not of themselves. And it's really encapsulated in the book of Deuteronomy, in Moses' final words of blessing over the people just on the borders of the promised land.

You remember that he pronounced a blessing over all the tribes in chapter 33 and in verse 26 of chapter 33 of Deuteronomy. You read as follows.

There is none like God who rides through the heavens to your help, through the skies in his majesty. The eternal God is your dwelling place and underneath are the everlasting arms.

He thrust out the enemy before you and said, destroy. So Israel lived in safety. Jacob lived alone in a land of grain and wine whose heavens drop down due.

Happy are you, O Israel. Who is like you? You could say the word blessed there for happy. Happy or blessed are you, O Israel. Who is like you? A people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help and the sword of your triumph.

[23 : 07] Your enemies shall come fawning to you and you shall tread upon their backs. Why are the Lord's people superior? Because they're better people in themselves. No Christian here can say, I'm a better person than you in myself.

I've always been a better person than you. We're superior in the sense of being elevated by grace. We are a people as Christians Christians who have the privilege of being blessed in Christ.

And blessed in Christ means being victorious in Christ, having a victorious life over sin and ultimately over death. Because that's what's working and behind their superiority, the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

That's their position. they have an identity that's separate. They have a unity together. They have a superiority given by the grace of God that enables them humbly to realize they are special to God.

They are a people of His grace and of His possession. They are elevated by His grace so that they are indeed a distinct people. Secondly, very briefly, the providence of Jacob's God.

[24 : 29] Now when you look at Joseph's life, the providence of Joseph's God or Jacob's God too, when you look at Jacob's life or Joseph's life particularly, at this point you can see just how long it's been since we first read about Joseph and his brothers in their younger days and how they were jealous of him and how they made arrangements that they would dispose of him which led to him of course ending up in Egypt, how he spent years there in prison and finally he was released from prison as one who could interpret dreams and then when he came to do that and Pharaoh saw the potential he gave him this position of being in charge of his government.

Long, long time. God's timetable is not just like ours. We want things done at once. We want things done by our timetable.

We put things in our diary, the diary of our minds and think if it hasn't happened in that time we begin to really worry and get disturbed about why things are not happening the way we'd like them to happen. Remember it's God's timetable that controls your life.

It's God's diary. He's got every page written and we're thankful for that because our own timetable and our own diary would not very often be the best for us.

God's plan for his people.

[26 : 04] So in fact what you can say is that all of this that's taken place in these countries in Canaan with this famine, making the people of Jacob move down to Egypt and now this famine reaching Egypt itself and Joseph making these arrangements for the people and for the Egyptians and for the separation of his own family there. Everything there is about God's plan for his people.

Everything that happens in the world, difficult for us to understand though it may be, everything that's happening in the world today, sad though much of a days, terrible though some of a days, wars and all the horrible things that are happening in the world.

And we're not condoning that. That's human behavior. That's sinful behavior. God is not pleased with that. But nevertheless, all of that is moving his plan inexorably on and it's a plan that is ultimately for his people when they will finally come to be shown in the glory of Christ.

Because here is really, you might say, the famine and everything that's happened for their benefit. And as we saw with a previous study of Jacob going down to Egypt and God assuring him that he would go with him, that he would also bring him up again and Joseph, in fact, would close his eyes in death.

There may be some sort of Egypt in your own experience today. There will be some type of Egypt from time to time if you're a Christian or even if you're not.

[27 : 37] Life doesn't always go as you would plan it. There will always be hardships, difficulties, temptations, trials, afflictions, hard choices, disappointments.

That's life. That's what life's like. But for every Christian, in regard to every type of Egypt, if you like, that God brings into your providence, there will always be a Goshen where you'll find light, where you'll find sustenance, some provision of God himself that you'll find where God himself is to be found and where God will actually come.

To speak to you, to speak to you, to assure you, to reinforce his promises toward you, even though at times they may look very distant. Somebody sent me a text this morning with a verse from a songwriter, Christian songwriter, Stuart Townend, that had really helped this person just overnight, going through hard times at the moment.

And this is the verse that was sent. That's God.

God's love. Looking after his people in Egypt. Making way for them to leave Egypt eventually. But Egypt itself has its own purpose in the experience of God's people.

[29 : 34] Because it fits the intended outcome. You see, when you look at the pages of Genesis here, you're looking at things short term. You're zooming in, as it were, just like you see something on the weather forecast or whatever.

You're zooming in on a certain part. Or maybe if you've got Google Earth or something like that, you can zoom in. And very often you're zooming in on places you've been to or where you live yourself. And as you zoom in, the whole world contracts and you come to focus on that little spot.

That's what you're doing here in Genesis 47. You're just zooming in on that little spot in history. And even in the whole of the book of Genesis, or in this chapter of God's people, you're zooming in and focusing.

And then you really zoom out and you realize this is part of a bigger plan. And as you zoom out, you actually come from the short term to the long term for the people of God in Egypt.

And you realize God is preparing them for what you find in the book of Exodus. To leave Egypt. To go into the desert. To walk with God. Onto the promised land.

[30 : 42] And isn't that how it is? For all of us as Christians today, the short term is this present life. Or perhaps this slice of that present life that you're presently in.

But even when you take the whole of your lifespan, it is short term compared to eternity, which is where we are heading. Interestingly, Jacob, twice mentioned at least to Pharaoh, that he was sojourning there.

And his family said, we are sojourning. We're pilgrims. We're not at home in Egypt. I'm sure that was for their advantage, that it would assure Pharaoh they had no aspirations to take over the country.

But theologically and spiritually, it's so important. It's one of the big words in the Bible to describe what a Christian life is about. What is it like in this life? You're a sojourner. You're a pilgrim.

You're a traveler. You're not at home. You're on the way home. And when this slice of it is finished, of your life, that's not the end. It's just the end of the foreword.

[31 : 56] The first chapter really begins when you reach heaven to be with Christ, which is far better. And as we indeed find in Psalm 16, the psalmist is saying in Psalm 16 how much he repudiates and refuses the idolatry that's around him.

He says, Do you have that one today?

What is your inheritance? Where will you go when you die? Is all you're looking forward to crammed into this life?

Do you have an inheritance safe somewhere else? Is your treasure in heaven, as Jesus put it to the disciples?

Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. So many people that you know around you are living for this world only.

[33 : 41] So many people think death is the end. So many people try to cram into this life. All that they think and imagine might give them happiness and satisfaction.

Not for Joseph. Not for Jacob. Not for God's people. The Lord is my portion.

And my inheritance. The lions have fallen to me. In the most pleasant of places. Nothing but the best will do.

For God's people. Nothing but the best does God have for them. Are you enjoying that best that God has to give?

Let's pray. Lord, our God, we thank you that you provide for us richly. And that through Jesus Christ, the inheritance that you bestow by your grace is one of great beauty, of renown, of power, lasting and precious.

[34 : 52] We bless you today, O Lord, for all that comes with our forgiveness of sin. With your forgiveness. With your acceptance of us. And with your placing of us to be your family.

We bless you, Lord, for the way in which your honor and glory is attached to the identity of your people. And we pray today that you would help us to realize the glorious position that you have given us, even while we are in this life.

Hear us now and receive our thanks. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, let's conclude our service now from Psalm 138.

Psalm 138, that's in St. Sam's version on page 179. Singing verses 4 to 8. The tune is Wareham.

O Lord, let all earth's kings give praise when from your mouth they hear your word. Let them extol the ways of God, for great's the glory of the Lord.

[35 : 58] And so on through to the end of the psalm. The Lord will certainly fulfill for me the purpose he commands. Your love endures forever, Lord. Preserve the works of your own hands.

These verses in conclusion. O Lord, let all earth's kings give praise when from your mouth they hear your word.

Let them extol the ways of God. For praise the glory of the Lord.

Although the Lord who dwells on high, The glory person he protects, Whereas the bride, the taunt divine, He knows the path of unrejects.

Although I won't have troubled heart, Your tender care precedes my life.

[37 : 44] You raise your hand against my blood. Your right hand saves me from their strife.

The Lord will certainly fulfill for me the purpose he commands.

Your love endures forever, Lord. We serve the words of your own hands.

I'll go to the main door this morning 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 always.

Amen. Amen. Amen.