

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 1 February 2004

No. T0303

Speaker: Mr. Douglas Pettman

Lessons from the life of Joseph: Together again - Genesis 45:16-49:33

During the two world wars, there were many wives and parents who received telegrams from the War Office advising that their husband or son had been killed in action. Some of these relatives received a different message – ‘Missing in action’. For some of these there was a presumption that they had been killed, but for others there was no knowledge of their whereabouts. We can understand the delight of a loving wife or parent when the young husband or son returned alive and they were together again. Jacob faced this situation too. He seemed never to believe his other sons when they returned with the tale that they had found Joseph’s special coat stained with blood. Indeed, Joseph was missing in action, presumed dead.

Last week, we left the story with Joseph and his brothers knowing each other and forgiving one another. In our chapters today we come to the point where Jacob understood that Joseph was alive and he saw him again. He made the journey to Egypt and spent his last days in the comfort and safety into which his son brought him. What a transformation! We will also see that Joseph is a type, or illustration, of Someone much greater, the Lord Jesus Christ. We must always realise that an illustration falls short of that of which it is a type. Today, we can do no better than indicate some general lessons in the chapters.

The delight of this story

Our first point is in the delight of this story. When it was reported to Pharaoh that Joseph’s brothers had come, the monarch called Joseph and instructed that he sent to Canaan to collect his father and all the family and bring them to ‘eat the fat of the land’, 45:18. So Joseph sent his brothers, with wagons for transport and provisions for the journey and, as a reminder of their past actions, said, ‘See that ye fall not out by the way’, 45:24. We find it just as easy to fall out with one another, even as believers, on our journey through life. Let us note this instruction.

The message that his sons took to Jacob was ‘Joseph is yet alive’, 45:26. That he had become governor over the land of Egypt was just an added blessing, but to Jacob this remarkable statement was almost unbelievable. He had to see the evidence of the wagons provided before he could accept that Joseph was alive. Eventually he realised the truth of the statement and we read, he ‘revived’. His whole person was re-energised and he said, ‘It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die’ 45:28.

Do you remember how the father, in the parable of the prodigal son, rejoiced to see his son coming back? He told his household, ‘For this my son was dead, and is alive again’, Luke 15:24. The fact of his being alive brought joy and rejoicing to those who saw, loved, and understood as the father did. Yet more astonishing was the raising of the Lord Jesus from the dead. The only way the disciples believed this was when they saw Him alive. Since then, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus has thrilled everyone who trusts in Him. It brings a heartfelt joy, a deep comfort for the present and certainty for the future. Make sure you rejoice that the Lord Jesus is alive today!

There is one more thing to say. The brothers told their father of Joseph’s exalted position as governor over all Egypt. We read in Paul’s letter to the Philippians 2:9-11, that ‘God hath highly exalted Him (the Lord Jesus), and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father’. What more glorious position could anyone have? The Lord Jesus is far greater than Joseph, and He is your Saviour. So let us rejoice today.

Jacob’s desire for God’s direction.

Next we read of Jacob’s desire for God’s direction. Very soon the family departed on their way to Egypt. But Jacob was not fully at ease. He was going to meet his long lost favourite son and with the invitation of Pharaoh as well. There was another thing which concerned Jacob even more. Would God be with Him on the journey? Would he be pleasing his God? The land of Canaan was promised to Abraham and his family and Jacob was convinced that he should remain there until God led him away. He knew the trouble caused in other visits to Egypt and had, himself, learned difficult lessons. So he stopped in Beer-sheba, uncertain what to do. God was so good to him! God spoke to him in the night, ‘Fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee

into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again...' 46:3-4. What certainty this gave Jacob on his journey. James tells us, similarly: 'Ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that', 4:15. The apostle Paul also found this true. Desiring to go on in his service for his Lord, Paul felt himself restrained in Troas. Where was he to go? The Bible records, 'After he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us', Acts 16:10. The Lord may not use a vision to speak to us today, but we can be just as clear in knowing His mind as Jacob was, so let us be sure of seeking it. 'They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength', Isaiah 40:31.

Direction for the good of Israel.

We now come to Joseph's Direction for the good of Israel. Jacob completes his journey. Arrangements are made for the whole family to go to Goshen, that part of Egypt which was most fertile and suited the sheep well. Joseph had the best in mind. But the supreme moment came when Joseph prepared his chariot and came to his father. Note how the Bible now uses the name of Israel rather than Jacob. Jacob describes the man of the earth, a deceiver, who had battled his own way through life as he chose. God changed his name to Israel at that point in time when Jacob had to give way to the will of God. So the name Israel, which means 'a prince with God', describes that characteristic relating to a man who is living with and for God. Jacob could not act as a man of earth in the presence of his son; he now acts as a man of faith.

What a reunion both father and son enjoyed! They were together again! Joseph 'fell on his (Israel's) neck, and wept on his neck a good while', 46:29. What appreciation of one another! All the years of absence are now overcome with one meeting. Israel is deeply satisfied. He does not need to live anymore. He has seen the glory of his son, knows now that he is alive and has total peace. There is a verse of a hymn which says:

*I have seen the face of Jesus,
Tell me not of ought beside,
I have heard the voice of Jesus
And my soul is satisfied.*

Israel felt this way and, when we today come into close communion and appreciation of the Lord Jesus, we will feel the same about Him.

But Joseph had much more thought for the whole family. Because he has such authority their place in Goshen is assured. In Egypt, Joseph has been of great benefit both to Pharaoh and to all the people. We see the way in which all is prepared for the blessing of the family, without usurping authority over Pharaoh. It is more wonderful to understand the way that the Lord Jesus, the Son, through the cross, has prepared the way for our blessing. 'God our Father...hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ', Ephesians 1:2-3. 'Even when we were dead in sins, (God) hath quickened us (made us alive) together with Christ...and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus...' 2:5-6. In these few words, we have read the word 'together' three times. Yes, as believers, we are together again with Christ and all with the approval of God the Father!

Discussion with Pharaoh.

We now read of Israel's Discussion with Pharaoh. We read in chapter 47 of the visit of this 130 year old man, Jacob, to the great Pharaoh. This monarch questions Jacob as to his age as though he is an amazing man but Jacob speaks as a spiritual man. He refers to his pilgrimage, verse 9, because he wants his pathway to be the plan of God. But we note, too, another thing. When Jacob arrives, and before he leaves, verses 7 and 10, he blesses Pharaoh. Perhaps we would have expected Pharaoh to bless Jacob. Clearly this is the reverse. We also read in Genesis of Melchisedec blessing Abraham and in Hebrews 7:7 we read 'And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better'. It takes a Jacob, with his spiritual characteristics, to bless a Pharaoh who, in spite of his position is only a man of this earth. How valuable to realise that a man of God, that is, one who has God leading his life, is of higher regard than a monarch who is without God. Let us value the enormous privilege we have as believers in our Lord Jesus when we are guided by Him.

Dependence of Egypt on Joseph.

As we follow the story through we next come to the Dependence of Egypt on Joseph. We must remember that, in the Bible, Egypt speaks to us of the world as it acts apart from God. This is evident from these chapters too. Yet Joseph, as a believing man, was given a high position in the land and this was because he was dependent on God. In his actions, with God before Him, he always respected the right of Pharaoh for whom he acted in Egypt. He never sought to take that position for himself. The Christian man or woman today may well fill a position in the world and should fill it in a way that honours God, certainly not seeking to usurp that of another.

Now we learn how Egypt fared. Over the years of the famine, the Egyptians used first their money, next their cattle, then their land for food so that they became slaves to Pharaoh. In all this they were grateful that they received food to eat. This meant that they were moved round the country to cities, where they could be fed more easily. All were now totally dependent on Pharaoh.

We read all this in chapter 47. This is so typical of the world in which we live. Do we find the world taking more of our time, interest and involvement as the years pass? What time is there for God? It is evident, too, that the more man sins, the more he finds himself enslaved by sin, the more he cannot get out of his situation. Paul writes to the Ephesians, 'In time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience...fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath' 2:2-3. Man finds himself like the Egyptians; even more so, in bondage to sin.

The family of Jacob, the spiritual man, were not in this position. Although they were in Egypt, they had Joseph there and they were free. They were together again; he was with them, he cared for them. He, who was alive, had that exalted position and authority over the land. 'And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to their families', 47:12. What a difference relationship made! So, too, we have a Joseph! We read in Hebrews 2:14-15, 'Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He (Jesus) also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage'. Thank God we are no longer in the bondage of sin but the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, came into the world, becoming man to deliver us. He is with us. He cares for us. Let us rejoice in Him!

Death of Jacob.

We next come to the Death of Jacob. At the end of chapter 47 we learn that Jacob lived another seventeen years in Egypt. He spoke with Joseph and made him promise something that was most important to Jacob. This was that, when he died, he would not be buried in Egypt but in Canaan. Such was the importance that the promise had to be accompanied by an oath. We may ask the reason for this.

As a man of God, Jacob needed to be sure that he was buried with his fathers in Canaan, the land promised to the nation by God. He wanted to be where God would have him. Let us just appreciate his desire for a moment. It did not matter to many others but, to Jacob, there was no place for him among those who cared nothing for God in Egypt. He wanted to be with God's people and it was his son who was to be sure to effect this. Is this your hope?

For the believer today we have a wonderful promise. The Son of God is to be active on our behalf too. The moment is coming when every believer, whether sleeping in death or still alive at His coming, will hear the shout of the Lord Himself as He comes to gather everyone to Himself. 'The dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord', 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. We are not to be left among those who care nothing for God. His beloved Son is deputed already to take each one to Himself and be forever with Him. This surely is a tremendous comfort. Let us rejoice in it. Jacob's request was granted; the Lord's promise to all His own will be fulfilled also.

Demonstration of family blessing.

Lastly we can see something of the Demonstration of family blessing. The nation of Israel was known to be God's people. They were together in Canaan. Now we find great detail in chapter 46 of the various members of the family. Every one of these kept together as they moved under the direction of God into Egypt. They even counted them – 'threescore and ten', verse 27. Not one was left behind.

We have already found that, on coming into Egypt, they moved together into the best of the land, the land of Goshen, where Joseph nourished and maintained them, 47:12. How well they succeeded there.

Then, in chapter 49 we find Jacob blessing his sons. In detail, he spoke of each one. Again, not one was left out and each had his place. Yet perhaps the greatest blessing was reserved for Joseph. He says 'Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall', 49:22. The leader of this family of God's people refers to the son who has been so fruitful, so refreshing to all. That fruitfulness extended far 'over the wall' of Israel to Egypt too.

When thinking of all this how do we feel, as members of the family of God, the 'household of faith', as Paul calls all believers, Galatians 6:10? There should be much blessing when we are together and moving together under the direction of our Lord.

There is regular blessing from the Son of God who cares for us day by day. Paul's letter to the Ephesians emphasises what God has done by often using that word 'together', and the word 'one' when describing what has been done for the whole church of God. As with Israel, all are included, no one is left out. Let us consider today, once more, all the blessing we have received from knowing the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, as our Saviour. When we do so we will be filled with thankfulness and praise to Him, both now and evermore.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.