

Lesson 13 “Joseph is Alive” Lecture
Genesis 45:16-48:22
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A belated Happy New Year! Each new year in our lives often brings unanticipated developments and changes. Some of these developments are good, but some of them can be quite painful. What we must remember is they are all coming via the loving, good, and perfect will of God. There are no unforeseen accidents or random incidents in God’s sovereign reign. Today’s lesson covers life-altering developments in the lives of Jacob and Joseph. While this father and son duo are no doubt the central human characters of our reading, we’re going to investigate the workings of the true central character in the lives of these men – God. Our hope is that you will see that since God does not change, His gracious, loving, and purposeful works that grew these two into great men of faith is seeking to do the same in each of your lives.

For an outline to today’s reading, we offer the following:

- God’s grace via Pharaoh and Joseph
- God’s goodness in reuniting Jacob and Joseph
- God’s provision in a famine via Joseph
- God’s providence in Jacob’s blessings of Joseph’s sons

Our story picks up with Jacob’s eleven sons going to Egypt seeking provisions in the midst of a famine in the land of Canaan. Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. He finally revealed himself to them, and their initial reaction to this news was fear. This is more proof that the initial fruit of sin is fear - they were likely terrified of what their now very powerful brother would do to them in response to their evil deed to sell him into slavery some 20 years earlier.

As Steve, Carol, and Cheri have previously shared in their wonderful lectures, Joseph was a type of Jesus. As a fleshly response to what the brothers did to Joseph, they *should* have been afraid. Think of the sinister nature of sin – there’s a temptation to do something that initially seems either pleasurable or justifiable, but the moment it is exposed for the evil it is, you immediately are flooded with judgment. You conclude punishment, revenge, or retribution is warranted. Joseph, though, being a type of Jesus, was ready to forgive and reconcile. This is the first point on our outline – the grace of God on display via Joseph and Pharaoh.

Additionally, Joseph’s dedication to excellent service to Pharaoh had won his favor. Pharaoh was pleased with the news Joseph had reconnected with his family. He instructed Joseph to give ample provisions for his brothers to go back to Canaan, retrieve Jacob and the rest of the family, and return to the land of Goshen in Egypt – the best of the land. He gave them carts, provisions – the best things of Egypt, and ten donkeys loaded with supplies for the journey. A little nugget to demonstrate the grace of God – you may recall Jacob had a coat of many colors made especially for Joseph. The brothers took this piece of clothing from him in their selling of him and dipped it in blood as evidence of Joseph’s death to Jacob. Joseph gave his brothers new clothes – no doubt clean and without blemish.

In verse 24 of chapter 46, Joseph said to the brothers as they were leaving, “*Don’t quarrel on the way.*” Initially, I’m thinking this exhortation was a brother knowing the combative nature of his older brothers, but I looked up the Hebrew word for quarrel, and this is a really poor interpretation. The Hebrew word is “ragaz” (pronounced “raw-gaz”), and it really means to be afraid, stand in awe, fall out, or fret. In reality, what Joseph is really saying to his brothers, again, being a type of Jesus, is “*Don’t be afraid.*” Sound familiar? Think for a moment you are in the brother’s shoes. Your sinful past has caught up with you, yet you are receiving grace from not only the one you sinned against, but also the second-most powerful man in the land. It’s an awesome thing to be confronted with the truth of God’s mercy and grace on your sin when you’re expecting judgment and condemnation.

The brothers arrived home and no doubt had some mixed emotions in having to tell Jacob that Joseph was alive. In the delivery of this news, they likely had to come clean with what really happened. Confession can be scary, as it presents us at our most vulnerable point – we are completely exposed. Hebrews 10:23 offers assurance of God’s mindset towards confession, *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”* Here’s the thing, what you are confessing, God already knows. There are no secrets with Him. In your vulnerability and nakedness, He is there ready to cover you with his forgiveness, mercy, and grace. 1 John 1:9 confirms this, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

Jacob’s response to the news of Joseph was completely understandable – he didn’t believe. Lying breeds mistrust to those who have been lied to. Yet, the evidence of Joseph’s and Pharaoh’s lavish provisions convinced him the news was true. It’s interesting to see how Jacob - his birth name, and Israel – his *God-given* name, are used in various settings. Unbelieving Jacob didn’t believe. Israel, seeing evidence of God’s grace, believed.

Before we move to the next segment of our outline, I think it’s worth noting the attitude of Pharaoh in this story. As an Egyptian, he did not worship the living God the Jews did. Yet, God was doing a work through him and used him to demonstrate His grace to His chosen ones. No doubt, his relationship with Joseph had impacted his mind and heart-set. Yet, how many of us consciously only surround ourselves with Christians? As New Testament believers, this is not only unbiblical, it is unwise. God loves every one of His creations. I don’t see any exceptions in John 3:16, do you? We are tasked with loving – not judging. I have learned and continue to learn wisdom from non-believers. God powerfully used Pharaoh to accomplish His purposes in Jacob’s and Joseph’s life. Again, since God does not change, we could be missing opportunities for God to bless our lives if we are choosing to only associate with fellow believers.

As we head into Chapter 46, we’re going to see God’s goodness on display in reuniting Israel and Joseph. Israel’s journey to Egypt was marked with a stop in Beersheba – located in southern Israel in the Negev desert. Beersheba was an important place in Scripture. At this place:

- Abraham had dug a well – Beersheba actually means “Well of seven” in Hebrew
- It’s where Abraham lived after offering Isaac on Mount Mariah
- Isaac lived in Beersheba
- Jacob left there to find a wife
- God spoke to Hagar and to Isaac

We see growth in Israel as in an effort to commune with and worship God, he was effectively asking God if it is okay that he go to Egypt. Faithful God responded in verses 3-4, *“I am God, the God of your father,” he said. “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph’s own hand will close your eyes.”* For me, Jacob is one of the tougher characters to warm up to in Scripture. There’s enough evidence of the old Jacob’s scheming and conniving ways to paint a picture that would seem to justify some judgment. Yet, what do we see *from God* regarding Jacob? The same thing we should *all* hope for from Him with ourselves – *patience*. While I have no doubt Jacob’s old ways did not please God, they did not prevent God from loving him and remaining faithful to him as He patiently sought to shape Jacob into Israel. We should ask God consistently to check our hearts towards those with whom we have issues. Our judgmental conclusions could be clouding the growth that God is achieving in them. Worse, our flesh-based conclusions are limiting our willingness to be a resource to helping God accomplish these changes through things like unconditional love, forgiveness, and kindness.

In verses 8-25 we’ve provided a genealogy of the tribes of Israel that would join him in the trip to Egypt. These kinds of lists that periodically show up in Scripture can cause us to just scan over them as they don’t seem to be all that important. However, God’s Word is never without meaning and purpose, so there is some helpful information in the description of Judah and his descendants. Perez was one of his

sons, and Jezron was one of Perez's sons. Judah is the line from which Jesus would come, and you see both of these names in the genealogical presentation of Jesus in the first chapter of Matthew. Additionally, we learned the Nation of Israel would start in Egypt with a total of 70 people. By the time of the Exodus, there were six hundred thousand men – not including women and children. I've read estimates of as many as 2.4 million in all left Egypt. This was clearly proof that God kept His word of making Israel's family into a great nation. A good God keeps His promises.

Israel and Joseph finally reconnected, and it was a very emotional moment. Israel said now that he had seen Joseph alive, he could die. Thankfully, God looked past that statement and gave Israel another 17 years to enjoy being with Joseph and his family. Joseph wanted to introduce his family to Pharaoh, but, to me, the instructions are another revealing component of this man Joseph. Shepherds were very much looked down upon in Egypt – Joseph described the Egyptian viewpoint on this type of labor as detestable. Yet, he instructed his family to be honest about who they were, *"The men are shepherds; they tend livestock, and they have brought along their flocks and herds and everything they own."* (Gen. 46:32) Given the negative Egyptian perception of shepherds, there had to be a temptation to not be honest about who they really were. Is that any different today for us in claiming to be a follower of Jesus Christ? Society is moving further and further away from Christian values. As a result, identifying yourself as a Christian today will more than likely bring some kind of persecution in forms like mockery, false judgment, or dismissal.

By telling the truth of who they were to Pharaoh – the head of Egypt, his response was surprising, *"the land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land. Let them live in Goshen. And if you know of any among them with special ability, put them in charge of my own livestock."* (Gen. 47:6) Telling the truth of who you are and your faith may seem scary at times, but we need to remember that we have a faithful God who never leaves our sides. These moments of confession of faith can be Divine appointments for the audience of these confessions. Our confession can be the match that lights the fire in a sinner to turn to Jesus. This is the wonderful power of witnessing. We don't have to be perfect to witness – just be honest with who we are and what Jesus has done in our lives to warrant our steps of faith.

The next scene in the introduction of Jacob to Pharaoh is fascinating. After being introduced by Joseph, Jacob blessed Pharaoh! Hebrews 7:7 says, *"Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better."* This old Jewish detestable shepherd was blessing Pharaoh! Notably, he did the same at the conclusion of the meeting with Pharaoh, so we have more evidence of God's work in Jacob. He was offering God's blessings on a *non-Jew*. This is who we need to be – bringing God's blessings to all in whom we come in contact. We never know who could be knowingly or unknowingly yearning to hear a blessing from God. I'm sure this caught Pharaoh off guard. He asked him how old Jacob was. His response showed the spiritual growth in this man, *"The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers."*

The old, prideful Jacob might have boasted about his life, but there's a humility in his response. First, he described his life as a pilgrim. In the NKJV, the word pilgrim or pilgrimage is used nine times. In each case, the word references a people who are going from one place to another, but not finding a home. That is who each of us is. We spend so much time and energy trying to fit in and make a home of this crazy world. The truth is, if you're going to seriously follow and build your identity with Christ, you're going to find yourself feeling like a stranger in a strange land. This is very much how I feel these days. I'm finding I understand less and less of what is going on in the world. From *Mere Christianity* – one of my all-time favorite books, C.S. Lewis offer this line to which sums up the mindset of a pilgrim, *"If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world."* Jesus said in John 18:36 that His kingdom was not of this world. This is *not* our home. Our home is where we are promised by God to go to upon breathing our last breath.

Jacob then said he was 130 years old, and his years had been few and difficult. The term "few" may seem like a strange comment with him being 130, but he was comparing himself to his grandfather, Abraham, who lived to 175, and his father, Isaac, who live to 180. He must have believed that he was not

going to live that much longer, but God would give Him the grace to live his last 17 years in peace reunited with his beloved son, Joseph. The “difficult” comment is an honest confession of the trials he had faced. Now I’m just speculating here, but my guess in his advanced age and maturity with his relationship with God, he was possibly aligning at least some of these difficulties as fruit of his scheming and conniving. Honest reflection is healthy up to the point of arriving at the point of gratitude for God’s grace and forgiveness. However, should that reflection seep into shame and condemnation – a place Satan loves to take us – we need to remind ourselves all of that was dealt with at the cross of Christ. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

We now move into God’s provision via Joseph with him providing his father and his brothers and all his father’s household with food, according to the number of their children in the best of the land – Goshen. The provision didn’t stop there as a famine came upon the land – remember, this was the fulfillment of one of Joseph’s dreams. As the Egyptian people became poorer and poorer, Joseph kept them supplied through the rest of the famine. However, at its conclusion, the people had sold themselves into slavery, and Pharaoh owned everything – the people’s possessions and land. Joseph set up a system where he provided the people seed to plant. They were required to give 20% of their crop to Pharaoh – effectively a tax. There was one notable exception – the land for the priests was not sold to Pharaoh. This is interesting because, while the Egyptian priests had their own land, the future Jewish priests would have no land. The tribe of Levi – the line of the priests - would be spread out across the other tribal lands as opposed to having their own land. The rationalization for this was God and their service to Him would be *their* “possession.”

Living in Orange County, we have hardly experienced a famine. The closest thing we’ve seen of this was the shortage of food supplies in the stores at the beginning of the pandemic. A famine means a great shortage of something. Perhaps you’re experiencing a famine of faith. The circumstances of your life are making it very difficult to see God’s love and His presence in the midst of your pain and suffering. I can relate to this feeling. This is why we need to stay in God’s Word as much as possible. If you’re not feeding your regenerated spirit with the milk of the Word, then you are creating a self-induced spiritual famine in your life. While we can’t be taken from Jesus’ nail-pierced hands (John 10:28), Satan is always seeking to rob us of our joy in the Lord – through deceit, pain, and suffering. The antidote for deceit is truth. So, we can effectively eliminate Satan’s primary weapon by spending time feeding our souls with the truth of God’s Word. The only reason there is a shortage of the truth of God’s Word is we’re not spending enough time in it. This is why you should cherish this Bible study. That’s not a shameless plug for People of the Word – just a fact that it is a wonderful resource to feed your souls and hearts.

The Israelites acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number – they prospered. Israel was getting close to his death, so he summoned Joseph and made him promise that when he dies, he would not be buried in Egypt. He wanted to be buried in Canaan with his fathers. This was his testimony that he did not want to be identified as an Egyptian. He served the living God and wanted to be buried in the land God had given his fathers.

We now arrive at the fourth component of our outline - God’s providence in Jacob’s blessings of Joseph’s sons. Joseph had gotten word that his father was ill, so he brought his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to see him. At the news of Joseph and his sons had come, Israel strengthened himself. This is the power of love – we find something in us, even in our suffering, to rally ourselves for the sake of love. The very first thing Israel communicated to Joseph was a blessing in verses 3-4 of chapter 48, “*God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and said to me, ‘I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.’*” This is the passing down of God’s promise given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

How often do we, when we see our children, grandchildren, or even great-grandchildren, bless them? Our flesh may be tired or frustrated with the way they are living, but how much value could we add if, instead of ignoring or condemning them, offer them a blessing? How many of us are looking for blessings each day? I believe that is one of the strengths of this Bible study – by being so devoted to teaching God’s Word, there are countless blessings we receive. Isaiah 55:11 confirms the blessings that come from God’s

Word, “*So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*” If you are being blessed by God’s Word, think of how young people or people who don’t know God can be blessed by it.

In verses 5 and 6, Israel does something extraordinary – he effectively adopts Joseph’s two sons – elevating them to patriarch status. This seemingly came out of nowhere, and I’m sure many of you, like me, are wondering why would Israel do this? Based on our knowledge of the history of the Jewish nation, we must draw to the conclusion that this was a movement of God through Israel. He must have been led by God to do this. When I think of this scene, I can’t help but to wonder what must have been going through Joseph’s mind when hearing this. If I were him, I can see myself saying something like, *‘I don’t think so, old man. I’m their father!’* Yet, I find it fascinating there’s no mention of Joseph contesting this move. Again, we have the Jesus-type being obedient to the father’s will.

Israel’s vision was very poor, so he did not recognize Joseph’s sons. When hearing who they were, his first inclination was to hug them, kiss them, and bless them. Joseph showed remarkable humility and respect for his father and bowed down with his face to the ground. He then positioned Manasseh and Ephraim in a manner that Manasseh, being the oldest, would be on his father’s right side to make sure he would get the first blessing. This had been the tradition that the first-born would receive the greatest blessing. Israel, though, crossed his arms and put his right hand on Ephraim. We see here that our human traditions do not always line up with God’s will. This scene of the second child getting the primary blessing is not unprecedented even at this early point in Scripture. We saw:

- Cain was the firstborn, but Abel was blessed
- Ishmael was the firstborn, but Isaac was blessed
- Esau was the firstborn, but Jacob was blessed (even though there were some shenanigans involved)
- Reuben was the firstborn, but it was Joseph who was blessed

Joseph, for the first and only time in Scripture, showed he was not in his happy place. He tried to correct Israel and uncross his hands, but his father said in verse 19, *“I know, my son, I know. He (Manasseh) too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother (Ephraim) will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations.”* This information helps us answer the question as to why Israel adopted Manasseh and Ephraim. This is a prophetic move as we’ll learn. In the future, when the nation of Israel divides into two, the ten northern tribes called Israel were often also referred to as Ephraim as they were the predominant tribe.

I believe I’ve shared with you before I’m a bit of a numbers geek. Being in finance, I suppose that helps. If you take the 12 sons of Israel, which includes Joseph, and add Ephraim and Manasseh, doesn’t that add up to 14? Other than the book of Revelation, we really don’t hear much about the tribe of Joseph in the Bible, so I can see the 14 reduced to 13. As I mentioned earlier, the tribe of Levi, who was dedicated to being priests, did not inherit any land, so they are effectively removed as a tribe. This is how we get back to the 12 tribes of Israel.

I mentioned at the beginning of this lecture that while Jacob/Israel and Joseph were the two central human characters in this section of Scripture, our focus should be on God and the work He accomplished through these two men via:

- His grace via Pharaoh and Joseph
- His goodness in reuniting Jacob and Joseph
- His provision in a famine via Joseph
- His providence in Jacob’s blessings of Joseph’s sons

I also mentioned at the beginning that God does not change. The Apostle Paul, speaking to the Gentiles inheriting the blessings of Israel, wrote, *“And if some of the branches were broken off, and you*

[the Gentiles], being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree.” (Romans 11:17) As we read of God’s grace, goodness, provision, and providence towards His chosen ones in this lesson’s Scriptures, we can safely and rightfully look for the same works of God in each of our lives as members of the grafted branch. My encouragement for each of you is to take some time and look for the evidence of these blessings from God in your life.

For me, when we were in the midst of the darkest moments of our trial, I found all of these blessings at the cross. We see God’s grace sending His only begotten Son to die in our place for our sins. We see God’s goodness triumphing over evil and resurrecting Jesus to be the mechanism of our salvation. We find God’s provision in the giving of permanent forgiveness and reconciliation to the Father through the cross. Finally, we see God’s providence in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

If you choose to look for these movements of God in your life, I am confident, if you look hard enough, you will find them. When you do, a good response will be this wonderful tradition we have established in the last couple of years – singing praise to God through the Doxology. Will you join me?