

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

7. The Saved Life: Walking into the Unfamiliar

Genesis 45:1-6

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He called for a famine on the land of Canaan, cutting off its food supply. ¹⁷ Then he sent someone to Egypt ahead of them -- Joseph, who was sold as a slave. ¹⁸ They bruised his feet with fetters and placed his neck in an iron collar. ¹⁹ Until the time came to fulfill his dreams, the LORD tested Joseph's character.

This morning we are in our 7th installment in our study of The Life of Joseph. The narrative in Genesis 45 looks away from Joseph to Joseph's dad. But everything we're going to look at today is tied to how Joseph experienced great suffering so that he might save his family, and the future of the nation of Israel.

Let's start with an observation — At the front of our text we see two names for the same person.

*²And God spoke to **Israel** in visions of the night and said, "**Jacob, Jacob.**"*

The name Jacob meant HEEL CATCHER or SUPPLANTER. It was a name that referred to his NATURAL strength — but it also spoke of his SPIRITUAL weakness. In **Genesis 32** we are told of an epic encounter that Jacob had with God. That encounter left Jacob with a limp. But it also ended with God changing his name **from Jacob to Israel** — which means *GOVERNED BY GOD*. That name spoke of SPIRITUAL strength despite his NATURAL weakness

THIS IS SO HUGE — Especially in light of what is before us in our text this morning. The **ONLY** time you are **STRONG** is when you are **RULED BY GOD**. It is **ONLY** the man or woman ruled by God that can **live in** all God has for them in Jesus; **walk in** all Jesus died for them to experience — even in the face of every thing that wars against their salvation from without and within. More on that in a moment. When this man started on his journey to Egypt he went in great faith and strength. That is why we are told that **ISRAEL** took his journey. It was indeed the plan of God for this man and his family to go down to Egypt. He moved in obedience and faith - even in his old age.

Genesis 46:1 So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba

Beersheba was the **BORDER** town. When he passed that place he would be leaving the promised land of Canaan and be on his way to Egypt. It was when he was on the brink of **LEAVING** Canaan that he suddenly began to realize the implications of such a move — and **in that moment** he apparently reverts back to being more like Jacob than

Israel. How do we know that? Because at that moment God didn't address him as Israel. Instead — God called to him and said, *Jacob, Jacob*. **God KNEW** the weakness of His servant at that very moment. God called to him and spoke to him in the midst of this trial according to his condition.

HERE'S THE POINT — Jacob's obedience and faith are mingled with fear and unbelief. The same can be true in our own lives! I often find myself identifying with the man who desperately declared to Jesus *Lord I believe, but help my unbelief (Mark 9:24)*. Most all of us — on numerous occasions and in different circumstances — alternate between Israel and Jacob. Sometimes we are *strong in the Lord and in the power of His might (Ephesians 6:10)*. But other times we find that *the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41)*.

The Lord had chosen Jacob the heel-catcher — and saved Jacob the supplanter and preserved him. But God's **great desire** was for there to be more of Israel and less of Jacob with every passing day; to be **far more** ruled by God than a man ruled by his flesh.

Here's another thing we don't want to miss — Jacob is at a **TURNING POINT** in his life. He is about to break new ground and go somewhere that he had never gone before. As he stands on the threshold of change he does something very wise — He comes before the Lord with sacrifice.

I say this in passing — but it is a really big thing— Taking time to come before the Lord did NOT hinder Jacob's journey — it was actually beneficial and in the long run economical.

In the OT it was common for men to bring their sacrifices before the Lord and **SEEK** the Lord for understanding and direction.

Psalm 73:16-17 KJV When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.

This is a **VALUABLE** example to us for those **TURNING POINTS** in our own lives — like when you get married and set out to establish a new household — like when you start a new job/business — like when you enter in to ministry — or begin to minister in a new place. By the way, every new day is a venture into the unknown. So in those moments come before the Lord with a sacrifice! You and I don't come bringing an animal to sacrifice — we come before God with a sacrifice of praise! We present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice.

The Lord loves to see His children concerned with being **RIGHT**. He loves to see us be so careful that we would take time to come before Him. He loves to see us make our decisions based upon the counsel of His Word and leading and direction of the Holy Spirit.

There are THREE important points to OBSERVE and to LEARN from (OBSERVATION/APPLICATION)

1. Jacob's fear was natural: It was the fear of change.

For Jacob to have such a fear at this moment is very understandable. Jacob was a reeeeeally old man (130) leaving the land he was born in. Age fights against change. Old men DO NOT like changes. When you're young — you have very few deep attachments to things in your life. IN FACT - you almost need or demand change. Think about it: Children don't want to do any **one** thing for very long. There are tons of people in their late teens, early twenties, that run all over the world with little concern for where they're headed next. They just can't wait to move on to the next place or next job. **BUT the older we get** — the less tolerant we are of change. As you get older you get SETTLED in to locations and vocations. It's been said that it's the older trees that strike their roots deepest. Such trees are NOT easy to transplant.

HERE'S THE DEAL — That is a big challenge in the Christian life. When every natural inclination is to become more rigid and less flexible we must be very intentional to stay fresh — to stay yielded and open to Spirit — be sensitive to His prompting — quick to obey — so we won't become like *old wineskins* that are incapable of holding the new wine of the Spirit.

So it was NATURAL for the man Jacob to experience apprehension, uneasiness and fear at such a major disturbance to his settled life — at the prospect of traveling to an unknown place to live. Jacob is about 130 years old. His heart would have been CLINGING to his homeland. He loved the oaks of Mamre. He loved the plains of Esdraelon. The hills of Carmel were dear to him. Add to that the fact that Egypt itself would hold in it an element of fear. Egypt was an ugly name to him. It was a place of bad times for his ancestors. Abraham met with trouble there. Isaac had thought of going down there — but the Lord told him: Do not go down there! It was with great difficulty that he sent his sons there buy grain. Everything about his past made Egypt a place to be avoided rather than sought out. Along with the promise of seeing his long lost son Joseph — the trip was also fraught with great risk and difficulty for a 130 year old man.

Change such as this would naturally produce fear **because** of the possibility of new burdens and temptations that would meet him there. As we get settled in to our lives and occupations we get used to the day in day out difficulties of life in that space. We become accustomed to those burdens and temptations that are unique to our own every day lives — like a burden that conforms to our back after a while. They aren't as heavy as they seemed originally — you get used to the weightiness of marriage and the burdens and temptations that are common in marriage. You get used to the weightiness of kids (first kids are rough, or sometimes the second).

But what about some NEW burden? It might try my faith in new areas. It might cause some fresh wounds.

CHRISTIAN — God-directed change carries with it such possibilities. That is why we want to be as **certain as we possibly can be** concerning the will of God — the direction of God — the call of God.

So we MUST note

1. Jacob's fear and apprehension of impending change - was

NATURAL.

2. God did not want His servant to be the slave of fear.

How do we know this to be true? That FACT that God desired to REMOVE Jacob's fears is clearly seen in the fact that He appeared to Jacob and said: *Genesis 46:3 Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt.*

NOTE: As we study THROUGH the Bible we begin to see those things that the Holy Spirit desires to EMPHASIZE concerning the heart of God for man. One of **THE MOST** emphasized truths of the Book of Genesis and most repeated truths in the Bible is that God is deeply concerned that His children NOT be afraid. The phrase "fear not" is used 80+ times. Other word pairings equal to "fear not" ("do not be afraid", "do not fear", "be not afraid") are used 30+ times.

HERE'S THE POINT — The peace and security of this **one** man was of great importance to the Lord. And you need to know that YOUR peace and security is of great importance to the Lord. Regardless of the source of our fears God goes out of His way to address anxiety and CURE fears.

The Lord wanted to address JACOB'S FEAR for a number of reasons

He wanted to address Jacob's fear because fear robs us of the joy that comes from knowing God — the joy that belongs to us as children of God.

There's a big difference between joy and happiness. Happiness comes from happenings — from the comfort of having things you want, having things go exactly the way you want them to go. Joy is a deep rejoicing, an assurance, a security that says, "I have the only thing that really matters." Happiness is not a bad thing in and of itself — but it can often be the counterfeit of joy because **happiness rests** in the feeling of comfort or pleasure. Happiness is rests in and rejoices in the blessings, not the Blesser.

Here's how the psalmist frames joy for us

Psalm 4:7 You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

⁸ In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O LORD, will keep me safe.

If David were writing that today he might say: They only have joy when the stock market is up, and I have joy all the time — because their joy is in the stock market. My joy is in the One who owns all the wealth in the world and is going to give me everything I need."

Here are some other Psalms that restate the same truth

Psalm 9:2 NLT I will be filled with joy because of you

Psalm 31:7 I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love

Psalm 32:11 Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

We don't want to miss this — Because joy is not the same thing as happiness, we can have joy even when we're sad.

Fear robs us of joy because it is connected with people — places and things that we look to for assurance and security

HERE'S ANOTHER REASON the Lord wanted to address JACOB'S

FEAR: Fear has a WEAKENING effect upon God's children
The CHANGES that awaited Jacob — the REALITIES that awaited him in that strange and idolatrous place would require greater strength in Jacob than what was required in the comfort zone of Canaan. Fear spells defeat for the believer because it saps our energies. Anxious thoughts drain us. Anxious thoughts can paralyze us. We can only think about "WHAT IF?" Anxious thoughts distract us — and rob time that should otherwise be given to strengthening our faith and undertaking the new work ahead of us

HERE'S ANOTHER REASON the Lord wanted to address JACOB'S

FEAR: Fear and faith are incompatible!

We just can't please God when we are in unbelief

Hebrews 11:6 Without faith it is impossible to please God

When God judged it right for Jacob to go — it was essential that Jacob rest assured that God is right.

HERE'S ANOTHER REASON the Lord wanted to address JACOB'S

FEAR: To turn back in fear is MORE than DANGEROUS — it is TREACHEROUS! You have NO armor for your back

QUOTE: Mel Gibson — *When you see a 9ft. Philistine in front of you with a huge spear and sword, and you have a sling and a stone RUN RIGHT AT HIM - NOT AWAY FROM HIM.*

1. Jacob had a fear that was very natural

2. God didn't want Jacob to be afraid

3. **God had a cure for Jacob's fear!**

First - The Lord cured his fear by showing that He knew him by name

Genesis 46:2 And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob."

We might be thinking — *"If the Lord were to speak to ME — by MY name — then I wouldn't be afraid?"* But do you think that God *doesn't* know your name? He knows EVERYTHING about you. He knows the

path you HAVE BEEN on. He knows the path you WILL BE on. As you and I face the fear of the unfamiliar we are told that He CALLS US BY NAME. We are told that He knows all of our needs. He knows all about the needs we have in a new circumstances that we don't even know about yet!

Matthew 6:31-32 NLT ³¹“So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' ³²These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.

SECOND — The Lord dealt with Jacob's fear of the unfamiliar by revealing Himself to Jacob as the UNCHANGING God

Genesis 46:3 Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father.

HERE'S THE POINT — What God has been to Abraham and Isaac He will be to Jacob

HERE'S THE APPLICATION — What God has been to all of His people throughout the history of man — He will be to you. The God of MOSES is YOUR God. The God of Elijah is YOUR God. The God of David is YOUR God. The Jesus of the Gospels is YOUR Jesus.

WE MUST ALWAYS keep this at the forefront of our mind and heart as we walk into the unfamiliar and the fear of change begins to grip us.

EXAMPLE: Early on in the ministry I was counseling a man whose wife has filed for divorce. After sharing with him the ability of God to change hearts he said — “But *she* won't ...”. I had to say to him - *SHE is NOT the issue. WHAT she is capable of doing IS NOT his concern WHO God is — THAT is your basis of peace and security in such a frightening time as this*

CHRISTIAN — IF God is YOUR God — THEN everything is secure. As secure as it was for Moses before Pharaoh. As secure as it was for Elijah before the prophets of Ba-al. As secure as it was for young David before Goliath.

IF God is YOUR God — THEN the rest will be right. IF God is YOUR God — THEN you have everything.

LASTLY - To deal with Jacob's FEAR OF CHANGE, God made some PRECIOUS promises to Jacob

In **Genesis 46:3** God said to Jacob *Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for....* Then God listed what He would do for Jacob

THIS IS SO INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT TO SEE: Each of these promises are based upon what GOD would do for Jacob

Genesis 46:3 for there I will make you into a great nation
Genesis 46:4 I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again

There is so much there for us. Because there's so much there for us I don't want to try cram it in this morning. We'll pick up here next Sunday.

9