

GOD IS NOT ABSENT IN THE CHAOS

3. The Saved Life: Walking into the Unfamiliar

Genesis 45:1-6

This morning we are in our 3rd installment in a series from the life of Joseph that I've titled: Go Is Not Absent in the Chaos. This morning we're looking at a point in the narrative that shifts from Joseph to his dad. But everything we're going to look at today — and the Lord willing, next Sunday in our first morning at West Park HS — is tied to how Joseph experienced tremendous suffering so that he might save his family, and the future of the nation of Israel.

Psalm 105:16–18 (NLT) ¹⁶He called for a famine on the land of Canaan, cutting off its food supply. ¹⁷Then he sent someone to Egypt ahead of them— Joseph, who was sold as a slave. ¹⁸They bruised his feet with fetters and placed his neck in an iron collar.

As we've learned — all of that is a picture of how Jesus suffered to save us from our great enemies of sin and death.

Genesis 46:1–7; 26 (ESV) ¹So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. ²And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” ³Then 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. ⁴I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph’s hand shall close your eyes.” ⁵Then Jacob set out from Beersheba. The sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. ⁶They also took their livestock and their goods, which they had gained in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, ⁷his sons, and his sons’ sons with him, his daughters, and his sons’ daughters. All his offspring he brought with him into Egypt..... ²⁶All the persons belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own descendants, not including Jacob’s sons’ wives, were sixty-six persons in all.

Let's start with an observation — At the very front of our text we see the Holy Spirit used two names to speak of the same person.

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

The name Jacob meant HEEL CATCHER. He got that name because he was one of twins and he came out of the womb holding his brother's heel. But the name also means SUPPLANTER — someone who pushed others out of the way to take something. SO the name Jacob referred to his NATURAL strength — but it also spoke of his SPIRITUAL weakness. But 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*. His new name would become the name of the nation that would come from his twelve sons. The name **Israel** spoke of SPIRITUAL strength despite his NATURAL weakness. He was literally physically weak — reduced to limping— reduced to desperation and trust in God.

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**. That concept goes totally against the grain of the wisdom of fallen culture that says you can only be strong when you are totally independent! The Kingdom of God has a totally different operating system. The Gospel declares that it is **ONLY** the man or woman ruled by God that can **live in** all God has for them in Jesus; **walk in** the abundant life Jesus died for them to experience — and do that even in the face of everything that wars against their salvation from without and within. More on that next Sunday!

When this very old 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**. He set out on that journey like a person ruled by God and trusting in God. It was indeed the plan of God for this man and his family to go down to Egypt. More on that next week, as well. **He stepped out in obedience and faith - even in his old age** (about 130 years old – almost twice my age). I've got to say that this so encouraging — and challenging to me. I thought I was old

when the Lord put it on my heart and Valerie's heart to plant Metro (52 years old).

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 was leaving the land of Canaan — the land God had promised to him — and was on his way to Egypt.

DON'T MISS THIS — 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. You might ask, "*Pastor, how do we know that?*" I 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. That is SO very important for us to know. But here's the deal: If you don't know the love of God for us wrapped up in Jesus — the idea that God fully knows us in all of our weakness can be pretty scary. That's because on the human level full disclosure carries the risk of rejection. But because of the love of God put on display in Jesus we understand that we are not only fully known, we are also fully loved!

God called to him and spoke to him in the midst of this trial according to his condition. I am so glad that God is so truthful with us. Check this out. Here's what we're told about the God of Jacob when He came in Human flesh:

***John 1:14 (ESV)** ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

He is not grace without truth. He is not truth without grace. Jesus embodies the fulness of God's grace and the fulness of God's truth.

HERE'S THE POINT — Jacob's obedience and faith are mingled with fear and unbelief. I have to stand before you and tell you that *that* can be true of me! My obedience and faith can be and has been mingled with fear and

unbelief. That's been true of me as we are walking towards a new home in West Park HS. I often find myself identifying with the man in Mark's gospel who desperately declared to Jesus; *Lord I believe, but help my unbelief (Mark 9:24)*. I am so glad that man is in the Bible. That man tells us that we can actually say to the Son of God: *"Jesus I believe — but can you help me in my unbelief?"* 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 chose Jacob the heel-catcher — saved Jacob the supplanter and preserved him. But God's **great desire** was for this man to be more Israel and less Jacob with every passing day; 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. His back was toward Beersheba and he was facing a place he knew nothing about. He was about to break new ground and go somewhere that he had never gone before. As he stands on the threshold of change, he did something very wise — He went 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. Like taking the time to use a map app before heading on a trip! A little time saves lots of time!

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.

By the way — what the psalmist was seeking to know was no small bit of business. He wanted to know *"Why do the wicked prosper? Why do bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people?"*

When he took the time to seek the Lord in the place where sacrifices were offered he got an answer; he got an eternal perspective.

Joseph's dad is such 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 volunteer to serve in a community of believers (that we refer to as a “church”) — or like Metro moving to a new geographic location, bringing the Gospel to a new demographic context and having to adapt our vision for corporate worship to new physical environment.

By the way — every new day is a venture into the unknown. We have plans; we have ideas, but we really don't know. So in those bigger moments, and in those daily 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!

Hebrews 13:15 (NET) ¹⁵Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, acknowledging his name.

We present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice.

Romans 12:1 (NET) ¹Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—alive, holy, and pleasing to God—which is your reasonable service.

The Lord loves to see His children concerned with being RIGHT. Not “right” in the sense of “I'm right, you're wrong.” 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. (If the Holy Spirit is leading us He will never contradict the counsel of the clearly revealed will of God for our lives in the Word of God.)

QUESTION — How careful are we about being right? Right in a decision; right in how we undertake life; right in the way we live out the Gospel — right in the way we express the heart and the ways of our King?

HERE'S THE DEAL — When we are actually asking Him to inform us; actually asking Him to define us; actually asking Him to direct us, we are actually being all that He made us to be and redeemed us to be. We were created to be dependent upon God; created to be informed, defined and directed by God. And as a loving heavenly Father, He loves the intimacy with Him that our need creates. I love it when our grown kids call and ask for our input in a major decision.

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

1. Jacob's fear was natural: His fear 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) — he was leaving the land he was born in. Age fights against change. Old men DO NOT like changes. When you're young (apart from your attachment to your parents and siblings) 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 into **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. THAT was Joseph's dad — he was 130 years and his roots were planted deeply in the land of Canaan.

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. If we are going to stay flexible instead of rigid, we need to be very sensitive to the prompting and leading of the Holy Spirit — quick to obey — so that in that moment we are learning to move. THAT is why every time we finish studying the Word of God I challenge all of us to respond to what the Holy Spirit has had to say in

His Word before we walk out the door so we won't become like *old wineskins* that are incapable of holding the new wine of the Spirit. I don't want to become that "old wineskin — I don't want to be put on the shelf because God is wanting to do a new thing and I can't contain the new thing He's doing. I don't want to be like that individually; we don't want to be that as a church.

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 — Jacob's dad — had thought of going down there — but the Lord told him: *Do not go down there!* All of that would have been known to Joseph's dad. 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 (the journey itself) and temptations that would meet him there. As we get settled into 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 common to our own everyday 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? A new burden can try your faith in new areas. It might require more of our time, talents and treasure — literally more sweat — and perhaps even 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. You never know for certain until you're in it.

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 (ESV) ³.... "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.

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. Over 110 times God speaks to His people (directly or by angelic messenger). By the way — the reason God has to say that so many times is because His people were afraid.

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. Side Note: What might cause you anxiety and fear might not cause me to be anxious or afraid at all. Conversely, what might cause me to be anxious and afraid might not cause you to be anxious or afraid at all.

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 rests in and rejoices in the blessings, not the Blesser.

Here's how the psalmist frames joy for us

***Psalm 4:7 (ESV)** 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. I have joy all the time. Their joy is in the stock market — but 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 (ESV)** I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love*

***Psalm 32:11 (ESV)** 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 — Fear robs us of joy because it is connected with people — places and things that we look to for assurance and security. The pandemic and the presidential election exposed what a lot of Christians were looking 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 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 find that all we can do is think about “WHAT IF?... WHAT IF?... 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 an investing in that new thing.

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 (ESV) Without faith it is impossible to please God

Pretty much with this one exception — it was never right for God's people to go to Egypt. But when God judged it right for Jacob to go Egypt 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 (**Psalm 139**). 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 those 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 had 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 your 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 46:3-4 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

Jacob — you don’t need to be afraid **because I am the one** that is going to do these things. 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.