

Our Father Jacob

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Date: 07 April 2019

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- [0 : 00] Let us now turn to the passage that we read, the book of Genesis in the Old Testament, chapter 45 and at verse 26.
- And they told him that as the brothers, Joseph is still alive. He is ruler over all the land of Egypt. And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them.
- But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.
- And Israel said, It is enough. Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.
- As you read the chapters that deal with the life of Joseph, you will be struck, I hope, by several important facts.
- [1 : 18] In the life of Joseph, there is knowledge before knowledge. By that I mean, Joseph knew his brothers before they knew him.
- And that is significant because there are, although the Bible never says that Joseph is a type of Christ, there are many parallels between Christ and Joseph.
- And when I say that Joseph knew his brothers before they knew him, it is illustrative of how Christ knew, knows, every one of us before anyone here came to know him in a saving way.
- And the second significant fact is this, that Joseph loved them when his brothers did not love him.
- So was Christ. He loved everyone who is tonight a believer before you loved him. And then the third fact is this, he saved them before they became aware of their salvation.
- [2 : 38] Everything in the story points to that. And so Christ did with you. Before you were aware of the surety and the certainty of salvation, Christ had saved you.
- And the fourth thing is, he called his brothers when they might have preferred to run from him. And so we have this marvelous account of reconciliation brought about in the family of Jacob, recorded for us in the chapter that we've read.
- Did you notice how often in the reading there is reference to God in verses 5 to 9? Now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here.
- For God sent me, says Joseph, before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years. And then again, verse 7.
- God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.
- [3 : 55] God has made me a father to Pharaoh. God has made me lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. God has made me lord of all Egypt.
- So you see, Joseph is not taking any credit for the position that he now holds. He attributes it all to the work of God.

Nor is he laying blame. He could have at the feet of his brothers for the way in which they had dealt with him. But he sees the sovereign hand of God at work in the providence that he passed through.

From the time that he went down into Egypt to the moment that he stands before them and discloses his identity to them.

He's looking beyond the secondary causes towards the actions of a sovereign God. Now, interesting as these themes might be, they are not my focus for tonight.

[5 : 04] I wish to look at the words of our text under three headings. First of all, the conflict between faith and unbelief. And I think Jacob is illustrative of the conflict between faith and unbelief.

Secondly, the compelling evidence that is presented to Jacob that leads him, thirdly, to making a certain decision.

The conflict between faith and unbelief. The compelling evidence that is presented to him leading to a certain decision. Well, when you read what the Bible tells us about this man Jacob, one thing I think that will strike you forcibly is how his emotions have such an impact on his life.

And especially on his faith. Now, I'm not being hypercritical of Jacob when I say that.

But, you know, sight and feelings are not the food of faith, but Christ as he is set before us in the Bible.

[6 : 23] Yet we know that all of these things play an influential role in our lives to our detriment spiritually.

And in this particular context, you can see how they affect the judgment of Jacob. And how they cause such strange turmoil in his mind and in his heart when his sons give an account of their latest journey to Egypt.

When they come back and they tell him, Joseph is still alive. Jacob is a man who was a believer, perhaps even from the womb, who had been engaged in a wrestling match with God.

And you could say of him at times what is written about his grandfather Abraham by the Apostle Paul in the letter to the Romans, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.

But at other times, Jacob comes across as weak and self-pitying. You remember what he said to his sons, you have bereaved me of my children.

[7 : 44] Joseph is no more. Simeon is no more. And now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me or all these things are against me. Now, I don't know if you relate to Jacob as I do, but I am immensely grateful that we have an account of Jacob in the Bible.

For I can identify with him in the way that his faith seems to vacillate. Here is a man who was so ready to believe the worst so that when his sons bring to him the blood-stained robe or coat that he so lovingly had made for his son Joseph, we find him stating, It is my son's robe.

A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces. Then Jacob tore his garments, put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days.

And the Bible goes on to tell us how the family did their best to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. Such was the depth of grief that he felt in his heart on account of the loss of Joseph.

You remember he had lavished much love on Joseph. He was more than ready to believe the worst. And there is no indication that he wished a search party to be sent out to find conclusive evidence that a wild beast had indeed devoured Joseph.

[9 : 30] He took the circumstantial evidence that was presented to him and read into that that Joseph was no more alive.

And yet what he believed was not true. And you know, some people will turn to passages in the Bible which are condemnatory and they will tell you that describes them.

And if you turn them to passages in the Bible that are full of comfort and encouraging, they refuse to accept that these passages have anything to do with them.

It's as if we have an inbuilt prejudice to believe everything that militates against us and to reject everything that is positive, encouraging and good.

Had you been able to discuss the matter with Jacob and said to him, what now would you say if I told you that without doubt Joseph is alive? Do you not think that he would have responded?

[10 : 40] It would be my greatest joy if I could but believe that. And it is possible that you are here this evening and if I were to say to you, do you believe that Jesus Christ is your Savior?

That he loved you and gave himself for you? Do I hear you sigh? And in your sighing, stating that you would give everything to believe that that is true.

But then you go on to tell me, but when I look into my own heart, I fear that that cannot be true. The conflict between faith and unbelief.

Now, perhaps you will tell me that such a conflict doesn't take place in the life of a believer. Well, I want to quote from the translation of the allergy that was written in Gaelic by Dr. MacDonald of Therrentosh.

It was translated into English by the late Principal John MacLeod, the one-time Principal of the Free Church College, as it then was, and also of the Minister of the Free North Church in Inverness.

[12 : 01] And in that English translation, perhaps it loses a little of the Gaelic, but MacDonald wrote his allergy about his own father.

His father, I think, was 95 when he died. And obviously MacDonald had huge admiration for his father as a Christian.

And this is what you find in the English translation, unbelief, as he'd acknowledge, often came to pay him court.

Now, I don't know, will believers here, would they go along with that? But I have no difficulty in going along with it. And then he goes on to state, "Tis my mind, and I'll express it, touching living faith, where'er it hath been of heaven begotten, and belief pursues it there." And then he uses very strong language, "And each one that hath not felt it as his burden and his woe, say what he may about it, all his faith is but in show." Now, that's very strong language.

"Each one that hath not felt it as his burden and his woe, say what he may about it, all his faith is but in show." You know, that is deserving, in my view, of very careful thought.

[13 : 33] Now, I said that this conflict between faith and unbelief is very real. And that, in my view, Jacob is an example of this conflict.

His emotions, his feelings, are all saying to him that the news that has been brought to him cannot be true. It's an impossibility.

Did Joseph not die more than 20 years ago? Didn't his own eyes see the evidence? And is that not how we tend to reason once we go down that particular road?

I believe that there are believers, but as for me? And then you stop. Why? Because you tell me, I know my own heart.

And you begin a subjective analysis of your own life. And the result is that you conclude that your spot is not the spot of God's children.

- [14 : 39] Yet, yet, I say, despite your subjective self-analysis, like Peter, your speech betrays. You know, when that was said of Peter, what was intended there was that his accent betrayed him. It told that he was a Galilean. But I want to interpret that in this way. That your speech betrays you. Your lifestyle also betrays you. That you too have Jesus at the heart and center of your life.
- Now, let me take it this way. Perhaps you are here this evening and you have not yet professed Christ. Is it true of you that like Jacob in this sense?
- You hear the gospel but you have not received it. You wish you could. Notice that to the patriarch, the truth about his son, Joseph, seemed altogether incredible.
- [15 : 51] The fact that his sons were telling him that he was alive and governor over all the land of Egypt, well, that was unimaginable for this old man.
- He had so long believed that the opposite was true and he couldn't easily get out of the trough where he was stuck. He had sorrowfully said, Joseph is without doubt torn in pieces on this idea.
- Although it was most painful and distressing for him, had nevertheless eaten its way into his heart and he could not get it out of there. And some have written bitter things against themselves.
- I shall be lost. I know I shall. It's not possible that Christ will save me. He will most certainly reject me.
- And you see, that has been based not on the scripture as it is set before us, but on your feelings and emotions which are deceiving you.
- [17 : 01] Joseph, Jacob was basing his belief at this moment on the fact that Joseph was dead. And it seems to me that some people, for want of a better phrase, that they hug their despair for so long that they cannot give it up.
- It's as if they find some comfort in their despair. They are like the man who refused to be comforted or those afflicted ones of whom we read and sang in the psalm.
- They loathed any kind of food and they drew near to the gates of death. You know, when someone is terminally ill, food is not something that is high on their agenda.
- They cannot bear the thought of food. Well, if you are here tonight and up until now you have been like that spiritually, oh, that the Holy Spirit would help you to know what an untruth, however long it is believed, is not the truth because you are still in a day of grace and in a day of mercy.
- And although you might have been in despondency of spirit for years, if there is no real cause for that despondency, is it not sad that you should continue in that way.
- [18 : 46] So, should you not seek the power of the Holy Spirit to break these bands and to set you gloriously free because there is a Savior, an all-sufficient Savior, and all power is committed into his hands, so much so that he rejoices in the salvation of those who become penitent.
- Well, the news appeared to Jacob incredible because it seemed too good to be true. Joseph alive, my Joseph, the ruler over all the land of Egypt cannot be true.
- And there are many who are spiritually in that state. They will tell you what you say, that Jesus died for me, that I have been redeemed with his most precious blood, that I can have my sins forgiven.
- It cannot be. Why not? Why not? Why should you be different from anyone else?
- why should you be left out? Do you think there's not a drop of mercy for you, that you are beyond the pale?

[20 : 20] Well, if that is true, you and Jacob are very much alike. And yet Jacob was wrong. And so are you.

The news is not too good to be true. although through not believing his sons, Jacob's heart became numb.

He began to lose heart. When they told him that Joseph was yet alive, we read that Jacob's heart became numb. He was stunned, for he didn't believe them. There is nothing that so makes us lose heart and bring on faintness of spirit as unbelief.

And you remember how David reaffirms that in Psalm 27 I would have lost heart unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

The conflict between faith and unbelief. Secondly, the compelling evidence. Jacob was confronted by three particular evidences.

[21 : 29] He was confronted, first of all, by the personal testimony of the sons. Now, you might argue that these sons were untrustworthy, that they were discredited witnesses.

And you would be right. You can imagine how a skillful cross-examination by a QC would try to discredit their evidence.

And you could see how a skillful QC would present them in a very poor light, as those who had told fabrications previously.

Their past was not the most trustworthy. Ah, but you see, these men had just been newly forgiven. How do we know?

Because we are told in the chapter we read, Joseph kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. What does that remind you of? Does it not remind you of the way in which the father received the returning wayward prodigal son?

[22 : 44] He fell on his neck and he kissed him as an indication of the forgiveness and the lavish forgiveness that he was bestowing on the returning prodigal. And here is Joseph, a man of influence, a man of power, a man elevated to the second highest position of power in the land of Egypt and he kisses his brothers and wept upon them.

In other words, there is visible evidence to support the forgiveness that he bestows upon these untrustworthy brothers.

others. There was forgiveness for these men and maybe when you read that it reminds you of how graciously and mercifully and lovingly the Lord also dealt with you so that with the psalmist you can sing tonight with me he dealt not as I sinned nor did we quite my ill.

With us he dealt not as we sinned nor did we quite our ill. oh yes there was a whole lot of things that his brothers didn't know but of this they were absolutely convinced Joseph was alive and it reminds me of a long time ago when I was at a question service and one of the brethren got up to speak and he spoke of how the believer must know Christ and his offices as prophet priest and king and of course there was truth in what he said but another brother got up and he said you know he said when I was brought to Christ I didn't know that he had offices and that is just how it is there is such a level of ignorance in our lives that we don't realize much about

Christ and even when you've been many years professing him there is still much more to learn about Christ but of this you are assured that Jesus is alive and the Bible reaffirms that not only did the eleven apostles see him many times but over five hundred brethren at once saw the son of God after he had risen from the dead there is no fact in history that is better attested than the fact that Jesus was crucified and that he rose again the resurrection story is just as true more more than two thousand years after it happened the distance between us and the date of his resurrection doesn't alter the fact of the truth that Jesus has risen from the dead

[26 : 00] Jesus Christ the son of God who died on Calvary was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Armathia the third day rose from the dead no more to die and ascended into heaven where he sits at the right hand of God and to this fact his disciples bore unwavering testimony in the face of huge great hostile opposition they were so sure of this truth that they died rather than deny it and most of them died by the most painful forms of death yet nothing could ever make one of them speak a word to the contrary they affirmed the resurrection of Christ they declared that they had seen him that they had eaten with him some of them could say they had touched him and one was asked to put his finger into the print of the nails whether he ever did is a matter of debate yes

Jesus Christ is yet alive and I pray that each one here may say this evening the testimony of these witnesses is true I believe it too it is enough Jesus is yet alive and in addition the Holy Spirit bore witness to this fact for after the ascension of the Savior the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles and their companions and they began to speak with other tongues and you remember how Jesus spoke to John and the solitude of the Isle of Patmos as recorded for us in the book of Revelation I am the first and the last the living one I died or I became dead as it may be translated and behold I am alive forevermore he had spoken with them so has Jesus spoken unto us in his word of truth

Joseph had forgiven them so Jesus forgives untrustworthy sinners like you and me that's the wonder of the grace of the gospel and not only that but these brothers had received portions from Joseph's table described for us in chapter 43 of Genesis and everyone here has sat at the table of the gospel as Jesus spread the rich feast of his truth before your soul can you say can you say tonight that you have eaten and drank at the table of the gospel did you taste and see that that God is good or were you present every time the gospel table was spread before you like a sick person with no appetite for the truth as it is in

Christ there is compelling evidence we have it in the Bible remember how the apostle John writes that which the beginning of his first letter that which was from the beginning which we have heard which we have seen with our eyes which we looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life the life was made manifest as we have seen it and testified to it and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the father and was made manifest to us that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you so that you too may have fellowship with us there is no lack of evidence compelling truthful trustworthy dependable evidence cross examine it as much as you want but it cannot be discredited many have tried some have even begun reading the bible with that very purpose in mind to discredit the bible only to discover that they have become convicted by the compelling nature of the truth as it is said before us in the word of

God that's the first evidence the second compelling evidence is they told him all the words of Joseph which he had said to them and what I understand from that is they kept nothing back I'm quite sure if one brother forgot something then another would step in to say this is what Joseph said too and a picture begins to unfold of men who had been accused of dishonesty men who had who had deliberately unaligned men who had spun a false story men whose consciences had been convicted as they reflected on their providence on the strangeness of their experience before this strange powerful ruler all the words that he had spoken to them his inquiry of their father his attitude towards them and especially towards

[31 : 45] Benjamin his closest brother by virtue of the fact that they shared the same mother and father his urging of them to make speed and return his specific instruction to them do not quarrel on the way oh how well Joseph knew his brothers and yet look at how brotherly he dealt with them he gave them provisions for the journey as well as clothing he gave them provisions for the journey it's estimated that the journey took about three weeks one way remember travel was very slow then compared to what it is today but above all and I come back to the verses to which I referred at the outset God sent me before you again and again

Joseph lays emphasis on the sovereignty of God the sovereignty of the overriding purpose of God in all of this and it demonstrates how Joseph was instructed by the Lord how he had learned from the Lord through the steps which he had passed through in his life painful steps at times uncomfortable experiences but in all of this Joseph had learned that God was faithful well how Joseph like these words would sound in the ears of a disbelieving Jacob and perhaps after many a long year have been forgotten the experiences of the past come flooding back into the mind of

Jacob what experience well I go back to the time of when Jacob when Joseph used to tell of his dreams and the predictions are in these dreams and you remember you'll find in chapter 37 what is this dream that you have dreamed says Jacob to Joseph shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you and you remember how that was such a source of jealous anger on the part of Joseph's brothers his brothers were jealous of him but this is the important point his father kept the saying in mind in other words he retained it in his thoughts and if you remember there is an incident recorded in the Bible in the New Testament that has a parallel with that regarding the birth of Christ and you remember how the shepherds came with the news all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told him and then the Bible tells us

Mary treasured up all these things pondering them in her heart and it seems to me Jacob is doing the same and his faith is becoming informed by the word of God so there is one other factor of compelling evidence and that was the procession of wagons or carts with which they returned remember when the brothers left Canaan they didn't have such transport the carts were provided by the Egyptians when Jacob saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him we are told the spirit of their father Jacob revived these were the final ingredient if you like in the spiritual smelling salts that revived a fainting

Jacob that removed his gloom and if you ask do we have modern equivalents for the wagons or the carts or tokens or should I say New Testament equivalents for the tokens well Spurgeon makes the observation that the Lord's day is such a token that the Lord's day is there to focus our attention in a busy world away from the mundane the things that beset us every day and that the Lord's day is there to lift our thoughts away from the mundane to the spiritual to worship the Lord and to reflect on our relationship to him the proclamation of the gospel is also a token of divine goodness and mercy but that doesn't exhaust the list for there are innumerable tokens in fact the

[37 : 14] Bible reminds us that every good and perfect gift is from God our very lives are from him our health friendship love and everything else that we value is from God they are given to us in order that our eyes be opened and we be brought to faith in Christ Jesus and so you have this information written but oh how significant the spirit of their father Jacob revived and Israel said note how the names are altered Jacob's heart was numb because he didn't believe them the spirit of their father Jacob revived but it was Israel who spoke who was Israel the man with whom God wrestled and who wrestled with God the man who clung in faith to God

I will not let you go unless you bless me and you remember what the Lord said to him your name shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed and so we see faith revived vibrant and strong implied in the language that is used here the spirit of their father Jacob revived and Israel said and that brings me to my final point the compelling evidence the conflict between faith and unbelief the certain decision it is enough says Israel unlikely as it first appeared I am totally convinced Joseph my son is still alive I will go and see him before I die how can you hear the note of joyous faith in the language that he employs you see the name

Israel is the name of surrender to God and everyone who surrenders to God are themselves inevitably changed and do you notice it's strange Jacob says nothing about Joseph's position or his status it doesn't say to the sons oh my what a wonderful position he occupies it doesn't say anything about that and you see what I read into that the attraction for Jacob is not the status or the position that Joseph holds in Egypt but Joseph himself can you hear the note of anticipation and longing to see Joseph there's no time to be lost there's an urgency about the movements of this elderly man so the first verse of chapter 46 reads

Israel took his journey with all that he had the only reason that Jacob wanted to go to Egypt was because he wished to see his son yes there was the element of gratification natural affection but how much more so for those who trust in Jesus Christ you know every person here who is a mother will understand this for nine months you carried a child and perhaps you wondered what the child would look like who would he or she resemble what would be their features what would be their characteristics how would they develop and the closer you came to full term the more excited and the more full of anticipation you were as you wondered what would take place and then the moment arrived and despite the pain of childbirth despite the fact that you probably said never again despite all of these things the moment you had the child these things they disappeared as you looked into the face of your newborn child how much more so in the life of the believer

Christ has been formed in you and you have been given the hope that one day you will see him the expectation that you will see him as he is not just with the eye of faith but see him really see him that you will have an eyeball to eyeball experience with the risen Lord heart is there not then an element of haste is there not an element of anticipation I will go and see him and you know Jacob is saying here I will go and see him before I die he had 17 more years to live he didn't know that he felt so old and he felt there was no time to lose and he wanted to see Joseph before he passed out of life oh my friend is there an element of urgency in your life despite the years that have passed do you want to see Jesus do you want to meet with

[43 : 50] Jesus meet with him before you die so that when you die you will meet him as one of his own Jacob's age I think compelled him to go with an urgency he wanted to rush there I will see Joseph Joseph you know I don't know if you are like me but when you are traveling on a train and sometimes you feel drowsy and the motion of the train perhaps you persuade yourself it says a whole lot of things but it seems to me that that when Joseph was going down to Egypt in the wagon that as the wheels of the wagon rolled that they were saying a message I will see Joseph I will see Joseph I will see Joseph I will see Joseph as these wagon wheels rolled inexorably towards their goal oh my friend are you here tonight and you don't know anything about that sense of anticipation about seeing

Jesus the Bible says he who believes in the son has everlasting life is it true that you've never doubted the truth of that text and yet is it also true that you have not believed on the only begotten son of God the gospel is true why do you not believe it and if you do believe it why do you not act upon it the conflict between faith and unbelief the compelling evidence leading to a certain decision I will see Joseph says Jacob I will see Jesus says the believer by faith let us pray oh

Lord our God we thank thee that there is so much yet to be disclosed when Christ meets with his people in the fullness and majesty and brightness and radiance of his glory oh may we be among those who are welcomed into his presence and the glory shall be thine in Jesus name we ask it amen let us conclude