

Blessings in a Foreign Land

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[0:00] Joseph's testing of his brothers is over, but the test of life in Egypt is about to begin.

! That's where we left off last Sunday evening in Genesis. This long-running sort of 20-plus years! of separation between Joseph and his brothers is over. Joseph tested his brothers and they were shown to be changed men, repentant men, men who would no longer betray a brother but would give their own life for one. And so not only is the kind of separation over, the feud is over, it's reconciliation. Brothers having wept together, come back together. And this 20-plus years of Jacob thinking his son is dead is over. At the end of Genesis 45 last week, we saw Jacob received news of Joseph being alive. And I guess for Jacob, it would almost be like getting him back from the dead.

Like Abraham, his grandfather received Isaac, Jacob's father, back from the dead as he was about to offer him up. So there is a kind of resurrection here for Jacob, isn't there? Joseph is alive.

And now chapters 46 and 47, Jacob, that is Israel, Jacob, the name is interchangeable here, and his family, all 70 of them, have to leave Canaan. The famine is so severe and Pharaoh and Joseph had invited them to come to Egypt. They need to leave Canaan to come to Egypt. Not so much for a test like Joseph gave his brothers, but just really for life, life with the trials and tribulations and all that it has.

But remember, as we finished up last week, that there was a kind of tension, an unanswered question. If this was a kind of TV drama, last week might have been a kind of end of season point, and you'd thought, well, hang on here, there's a big question hanging over this. Now, what's that question?

[2:14] Well, it's this. God's people have been promised the land of Canaan. Genesis 12, the Lord says to Abraham, go from your country, your people and your father's house, to the land I will show you. That is Canaan. Canaan is that land. It's their inheritance from God. But how does Genesis 46 start? Genesis 46, one. So Israel took his journey with all he had. They're leaving. So the question is, well, what of that promise? Why are they leaving? How can it be that they're heading on a journey now? They're meant to be here. But now they're traveling over there down to Egypt. They're leaving. Sorry, what?

Think of Aberdeen not being allowed into Pottery. The team bus pulls up. All the fans are there, ready to play a game. Saturday at three o'clock. Yeah, you're not getting in. Hang on. This is our home.

I'm sure someone here can tell me how long Aberdeen have played at Pottery. I have no idea how long it is. A hundred years. Whatever it is. We've been here a hundred years. No, you're not in. Think of going home this evening after church. You get home. Someone's changed the locks on your doors, taken your keys.

You're not allowed in. Hang on. This is our home. This is the place we're meant to be. Sorry, you're not getting in. You've got to leave now. Find somewhere else. That word there, 46 verse 1, journey, is often translated sojourn. We see that elsewhere, don't we? Kind of pepper through the passage. Sojourn means wandering, being away from home. We belong here in Canaan, but we're going to live over there now, away from the place God has said. And I guess then the question hanging over that is, well, how are we going to live now? How are we going to live? What is life going to look like?

Now, the New Testament picks up that idea too, doesn't it? Peter writes in his first letter to the elect exiles. Later, he writes and says, we are aliens and strangers. We are those who follow the Lord Jesus, who sojourn, who journey through life, waiting for home. Heaven is our home. The new heavens and the new earth, which Christ will bring down at his return. That is our home. John Bunyan, what is his most famous book called? Pilgrim's Progress. Pilgrim's Progress. Christian goes from the city of destruction to the celestial city on a pilgrimage. He's wandering. Aliens, strangers, exiles, sojourners, those who journey. That is God's people now as they go to Egypt. And that is us now too in Christ as we wait for glory. And so, dear friends, let me ask you, have you felt like a stranger this week in

[5:15] Aberdeen? Maybe you're brand new to Aberdeen. I spoke to someone who's brand new to the city. You probably have just because you're new here. But even if you're from Aberdeen, let me ask you, have you felt like a stranger in Aberdeen this week? A stranger because you're a Christian? Because you have a heavenly passport? But what's it like when you're a stranger somewhere? You can feel kind of a bit left out.

You can't always follow or understand the kind of social or society norms. Perhaps we've visited countries. Maybe some of you here have traveled. You've gone to some countries, and they have kind of norms there. And you just think, I just can't do that. Often it's around food, isn't it? They eat something that just makes our stomachs kind of turn up on end. I just couldn't do that.

Have you felt that in Aberdeen this week? Have you had occasion in feeling that to ask yourself, how do I now live because I belong to Jesus? How do I live now in school, in work, at home, if it's there, wherever it is? I belong to Jesus, and what he has shown me is different to this. I feel like a stranger. How are Israel to live as they head down to Egypt? How are we to live in this world?

Well, we have three things this evening to remember. Three things to know, three things to remember. One, that God is with us, that God is with us, to remember God's presence. Look at 46 verse 2, and God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, here I am. Then 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. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes. As Jacob leaves to go, he gets this amazing vision, word from the Lord, doesn't he? Don't be afraid. I will make you great, like I promised to Abraham.

I myself will go with you. I will be there, and I will bring you back again, and you will see Joseph. Sometimes, before leaving for a long car journey, I kind of hope that there would be like a light on the dashboard that would come on that would say, don't worry, I won't break down this time on this long journey. All will be well. Or perhaps even better, that the AA might phone me up and say, before you take this really long journey, we're actually just going to send a mechanic to sit in the car with you. And as you take this long journey down to England, or wherever it is, something goes wrong with the car you don't even need to phone. The mechanic's right there. He'll jump out, make it all better. The assurance, the peace of mind. Someone is with me who knows what they're doing.

[8:14] It's going to be okay. Well, how much more? How much more for Jacob? Jacob, as he prepares to leave Canaan, he goes to Beersheba. There he prays, doesn't he? That's the southernmost kind of point in Canaan.

And God says, I will be with you in this foreign land. As you go to undertake life in this foreign land, I will go with you. I wonder if you've ever faced a trial or a test of something.

Maybe it's going to a waiting room or even in for some surgery. Or maybe faced a really difficult conversation with someone at work or a family member, whatever it is. And you're speaking to a friend about it beforehand or a family member, and they said, you know what? On that day, at that appointment for that difficult conversation, for that medical, whatever it is, I'll be there.

I'll go with you. I'll sit there. I'll hold your hand. Jacob goes into days, years. These are 17 years Jacob's going to have before he dies in Egypt, wandering, knowing that he is with God. God is with him, and we'll be with his, all his people. And friends, as we go into the world, I think we can say that really, well, we have it better than Jacob. Why? Well, God is with us, and he's come in the person of the Lord Jesus. What is it that we're going to start to sing and read about lots of in the coming weeks ahead? That Jesus is what? Emmanuel, God with us. I heard my first Christmas carol yesterday. I couldn't quite believe it. But God with us, Emmanuel, isn't just for Christmas. It's for all God's people in all circumstances, no matter where they are in the world. It's for us always to rejoice, and God is with us. He's with us. And it's not just at the coming of Christ in his incarnation that he is named kind of Emmanuel, God with us. But where else do we get this reminder that Jesus is with us?

What does Jesus say, some of his last few words to his disciples after his resurrection? What does he say in Matthew 28 as he gives the great commission? He tells his disciples, and behold, I am with you always, to the very end of the age. So, dear friends, how do we live in this life in these days as aliens and strangers, in a city, in a home, in a workplace, where we know that we just don't quite belong? Knowing that God is with us. He's with you. He's with you in school.

[10:56] When you're getting a hard time for going to the SU group on a Thursday lunchtime. He's with you in university when you're getting a hard time, and you feel alone and isolated because you're not able to join in with all your classmates as they drink to oblivion. He's with you at your dining table, your desk at work, as you sit in the car with your spouse, and they don't quite understand why is it that you're coming to church again this Sunday. He is with you wherever it is. He is always with you.

But you notice here as God speaks to Jacob in these few words, he gives Jacob, doesn't he, a wonderful reminder of his character. Because I guess it's good to know someone's with us, but it's even better when we know what they're like, when we see what their character's like. And what do we see of God's character? Well, there's a number of things, just a few. We see his power, don't we? What does he say to Jacob? Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. God is stronger. Jacob has every cause to be afraid, doesn't he? We learn, don't we? The Egyptians don't like shepherds. We'll come to talk a little bit about that in a few moments. But he's got every reason to be afraid. Foreign power. He's completely helpless. An army, a nation. What is he going to? Don't be afraid. I'm with you. Second, we see he's a God who will always keep his promises. Can you see the promises here? There's again kind of more, I don't know if people still use hyperlinks these days. You know, you click something and it sends you back. The hyperlinks here just keep going back to Genesis 12 again and again. What does he say?

I will make you a great nation. And that is God's promise to Abraham. He's a God who keeps his promises. He will do what he said he will do. They've gone from one, haven't they, with Abraham?

There's 70 here come down, but there's a lot more to come. God says, I will make you great. He also promises to bring them up again, doesn't he? These are not days to make themselves at home there. No, these are days of sojourning. I promise you this land and you will come back to it. He's a God who keeps promises. Do you remember that this week? Remember that. God will always keep his promises to us in Christ. Thirdly, do you see something of God's just tenderness and care for Jacob?

He says to Jacob at the end there, you will see Joseph. You will see Joseph. In other words, he's really saying what? You're going to make the journey safely. There was no kind of first class fly Egypt flight that he could take from Canaan down to Egypt with, I don't know, I've never been on a first class cabin before. I have no idea what you get, right? Is it caviar and kind of whatever, however much Fanta it is you want to drink or whatever? I don't, right? There's no option like that.

[13:50] Jacob is 130 years old at this point. With all this journey before him and days of famine, he's traveling with 70, his whole number. God says, you'll make it. You'll be safe.

What tender care and goodness of God to give Jacob that assurance. We see God's power, God who keeps his promises. We see his tender care. So dear friends, let me ask you, how do you think of God this evening? Are we reminded? Do we think of God's power? God is a promise keeper.

Power, tenderhearted, faithful. I think we are so prone to, at least I know I am, so prone to misread and forget God's character. The first readers of Genesis were God's people about to go back into the promised land. And actually, their forefathers, within days of rescue from Egypt, after coming back up after 400 years there, we're at the start of that. The first readers are right at the end of all of that. What do they do after days after being rescued? Literally within weeks, they moan and they complain and they grumble against God, don't they? Think about what happens after the conquest in the days of the judges. Each does what's right in their own eye, God's character forgotten, besmirched. Oh, we're so prone to forget God is with us and what he is like.

So, dear friends, how do you think of God this evening? The one who is with us? The tyrant? Maybe like a 1940s caricature headteacher-like? Cane in one hand, chop duster in the other, ready to be thrown and hit across someone's head? Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who I quoted last week, he gave the Templeton Address in 1983 and asked what's the heart of the problem in the world today.

He said, men have forgotten God. But what's the heart of the main issues that we can have in the church? Men have forgotten God. What can be at the heart of some of the issues in our own Christian life that lead us away from God or make us prone to wander away from him or not to feel that tension that we are citizens of another place? We can forget God and what he's like, his presence with us, the beauty of his character, his goodness, that even in days of wandering and pilgrimage, which, when we're not at home, he is with us, he loves us, he will keep his promises. So, dear friends, every day, every day, remember God is with his people. He's with you. A God who says, we need not be afraid. A God who is a promise keeper, tender, slow to anger, abounding in love, who is with his people to the end of the age. Secondly, then, how else are we to live in days of pilgrimage and wandering? Well, God also calls us to be distinct. God is with us, and he calls us to be distinct. As Jacob and his family arrive, notice how Moses records for us that they do not settle amongst the Egyptians. They live in a distinct area, don't they, in Goshen. We get it a number of times. At one point, it's called Ramesses, likely what it was called a little bit later on, but we just get Goshen, Goshen, Goshen, Goshen. This is where they're going. Look down there at verse 28.

[17:23] He had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to show the way before him in Goshen, and they came into the land of Goshen. Then Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to meet Israel, his father, in Goshen. He presented himself to him and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while. Now, we do just need to pause there. We want to let the narrative kind of do some of the work here. Think of Joseph and Jacob back together, moving the tears, the weeping. There they are. But again, look where it's happening.

It's in Goshen. Verse 33, when Pharaoh calls you and says, what is your occupation? You shall say, your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even till now, both we and our fathers, in order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen. Chapter 47, verse 1, Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, my father and my brothers with their flocks and herds and all that they possess have come from the land of Canaan. They are now in the land of Goshen. Verse 4, they say to Pharaoh, we have come to sojourn in the land, for there are no pastures for your servants, for the famine is severe in Canaan.

And now, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen. Remember last week, we said that repetition can help us make a point, an important point, as we're reading the Bible, something that's repeated and repeated. There must be something there. Well, we get it all the way through.

Joseph comes and they talk about being in Goshen. Then they come to Pharaoh, Goshen, Goshen, Goshen. What is the point? They are to live separate and distinctly from the Egyptians. What's the old song?

Walk like an Egyptian. Was it the Bengals? Can't say. I've listened to it all that much, but I'm aware of that song. God's people, as they come down to Egypt, are to not walk like an Egyptian. They are to walk, spiritually speaking, like God's people, like God's covenant people. Even through Genesis, so far, there's been the fear of God's people kind of being wiped out or succumbing to external force and pressure. But here, Joseph is sort of remembering or aware of the pressure of kind of assimilation, something that Joseph would have surely felt as he was down there and given an Egyptian name and an Egyptian wife and children and all that went on with that. I think he's aware of that.

[19:50] And therefore, God's people are to be distinct. And I think that is why we have the episode of the sheep here and all this thing about Egyptians not liking shepherds, people that keep sheep, and therefore you tell all this to Pharaoh. We kind of wonder, why is that there? Why is there so much about Egyptians hating shepherds? Why is it that if Egyptians hate shepherds, that they're to go to Pharaoh and tell them that? It would seem a little bit like going through border control as you enter a country and saying, oh, just before I enter border control, passport control to come in, I actually want to tell you that very thing that this country hates so much, yet I do that, right? I don't think many of us would want to be standing at the border of some foreign country with our passport open, knowing that there's no hope behind us, there's no food or anything going on, and we need to get in to tell them that.

I think most of us would say, can we just keep it quiet that this thing that this country hates we actually do or we really like? So why does Joseph tell his family, and why do his family then come to Pharaoh and tell them we're shepherds when the Egyptians don't like shepherds? Well, I think Joseph is very shrewd. In saying they're shepherds, which the Egyptians hate, he's ensuring that they are kept to the side, that they can geographically live distinctly and not be assimilated.

So how are we to live in this world? Well, we are to remember that we are to be distinct. We are citizens of heaven. We don't belong here, and we're not to take on the characteristics of this world around us. Now, this doesn't mean living off and onto the side of some monastery or Christian kind of commune, but it does mean living distinctively in this world. Friends, it is what we heard this morning from Nehemiah, distinctive, holy living in the world, but not of the world.

So let me ask you again, are there things among your work colleagues, your non-Christian friends or families that make you feel like a stranger here, that are distinct, that are different?

Everybody comes in on a Tuesday morning talking about that television program, and I'm not because I know that what I would see or hear would lead my heart away from Christ. I know I'm not worshipping that God of money, sex, selfish ambition, whatever it is, distinct.

[22:27] Or whatever else it is, is it with our time, I'm serving at camp, being here on a Sunday, in some way, like we heard this morning, or many other ways the gospel holds out, are we living distinctly for Christ? And we need to remember that, don't we? And I think as time goes on in the months and years ahead in Scotland, I think that living distinctly will become clearer, but I also think it will become harder and more costly. Why? Well, for hundreds of years, probably like 500 plus years, being a Christian in Scotland has more or less looked like being Scottish or British. They've looked pretty similar. The religion of this nation has been, or was for a long time, Christianity, and it is not anymore. And so we here this evening, if we know the Lord Jesus, we do not worship the secular gods. We worship the God of Jacob, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We worship the Lord

Jesus. And so we need to live distinctly as we seek to honour and worship him here in this world. I think those lines will become more distinct, clearer, and it'll be all the more important that we do. So as we live and sojourn in this world, we're to remember God is with us, to remember that he calls us to be distinct. And thirdly, we are to remember that God blesses us, that God will bless his people. The banner over this section of Genesis, really over these last number of chapters, 47, 48, 49, is blessing. I don't know if people really do banners anymore or talk about them so much, but if we had a banner that you could kind of write over this or a heading, it'd be blessing. Genesis is the book of beginnings, but I think we could also call it a book of blessings, certainly as we arrive towards the end. We have here blessing, blessing, blessing. God wants to bring blessing. Even in days of wandering, even in days when we're not at home, God wants to bring blessing. Now, we have a few different blessings going on here. We have Pharaoh being blessed by Jacob. He blesses him twice. Do you see it? 47, verse 7, 47, verse 10? Pharaoh's blessed by Jacob. He's also blessed, Pharaoh, because he gains all the land that Joseph buys up from the Egyptians. Now, Genesis 47, kind of 13 to 26, they sound a bit like kind of Egyptian kind of agricultural policy towards the end of the famine and afterwards. It kind of reads like something that maybe you would think would be in a government paper somewhere.

Why is this here? Why are we told about Joseph going to these people and taking their livestock and their land and all this going on? Why is it here? Egypt sell off their land, don't they? And Pharaoh benefits. He's blessed, and he's going to be blessed going on, Pharaoh, because he's going to get 20% of their income, of their yield every year. Now, as we read some of that in 47, maybe we thought it sounds like they're getting a bit of a raw deal, but they are blessed. Well, why? Well, they don't starve. Did you see it twice? They come to Joseph and say, we're going to die. Yes, they sell their land.

Yes, they will pay like a kind of tax going forward. It's a kind of serfdom here, isn't it? But do you see what the Egyptians say in verse 25? They say, you have saved our lives. You've saved our lives.

So Pharaoh is blessed. He gets a blessing from Jacob. He's blessed by all he gains from the land. Egypt are blessed as a people in a way because they live on. And lastly, we also see that the people of God, Israel, the kind of nation, Jacob and his family, they are blessed too. Verse 27 of chapter 47.

[26 : 39] Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen, and they gained possessions in it, and they were fruitful and multiplied greatly. And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt 17 years.

So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, are 147. So Israel are blessed too. Now, what's amazing about some of the things we read there? Well, one, Israel in the land of Goshen, they don't have to sell it like the Egyptians do with their bit. Did you notice that? We get this whole bit about the Egyptians coming, they give their livestock, they give their land. That doesn't happen to Israel.

No, they can kind of keep Goshen. And secondly, do you see how Israel are blessed? We see it in those two words. They were fruitful and multiplied. Fruitful and multiplied. That's another kind of hyperlink words that take us right back to the beginning of Genesis. God says to Adam, you are to be fruitful and multiply. To Adam and Eve. That's kind of Eden language now. Eden language. Adam and Eve were to be fruitful and multiply. And here Israel are doing that. It's a sign of prospering, blessing, God flourishing his people. Even now, what? Outside of the garden and outside of the land. They are flourishing and prospering, even in these days of famine, even in days away from Canaan. Blessing, blessing, blessing.

So, dear friends, this evening, let me ask, do we know, do we remember that we serve a God who wants to bless his people? Who wants to bless and flourish? Now, there are kind of two ways that we see this here. One is that God blesses his people. He's blessing Jacob and his family there. And for us today, that means God is looking to bless his church, his covenant people, even in days of wandering.

Now, what's the New Testament kind of equivalent of this kind of blessing being fruitful and multiplying? I think it's the word of God going out in the church. I think that's what it is. It's the book of Acts and all that's happened since Pentecost is the gospel has gone out.

[28:54] God doesn't promise to kind of bless any specific small C local kind of church, but he does promise to bless his capital C church, his people through his words as the gospel goes out and people are saved. So, very, very simply, in these days of wandering, of pilgrimage, of waiting for the Lord Jesus to return, or before we go to heaven, we are to expect the blessings of the church being built, of God's kingdom to expand and grow, and sinners to be saved, of pilgrims starting their journey to glory.

And friends, is that not the greatest blessing? Is that not the greatest joy? When one sinner is saved, how are we to live in exile by remembering that God saves sinners? Those people amongst who you feel like strangers, your classmates, people in your family, people on your street, whoever it is, those people you think, I feel like a stranger here because I belong to Jesus, God wants to bless his church. He wants to save those people. So, what confidence that can give us as we look to share the gospel, what confidence that can give us to know that we belong to a kingdom that will never end, to a church that will not be destroyed. The Westminster Confession writes this, Nevertheless, there shall always be a church on earth to worship God according to his will. There will always be a church on earth to worship God. Yes, yes, the gospel will go out and bear fruit and multiply to the very ends of the earth. God wants to see that done. Yes, there are times and seasons where that can be a little less seen, but God will do it. He will do it. So, do we know that God wants to bless us, to make us flourish and thrive? That doesn't mean material gain or growth, no, but to grow in love and number as we seek him. And secondly, what we've seen a little bit here is that through his people, God does want to bless the world. Through his people, he does want to bless the world.

Pharaoh and Egypt are pagans here, but they are blessed. And so, by the presence of the church in this world, there should be blessings. That's also part of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, isn't it?

God says, I will make you a blessing and I'll bless those who bless you. And part of that is playing out here through Jacob and through Joseph. And Christians, can they not? And churches can bring blessings to through this world. Some of them, if we like, we could say are kind of common grace blessings.

Christians being instrumental to bring the end of the slave trade, of bringing education to all, and of many things like that, medical advancements, whatever else it is. But of course, we should know the biggest blessing we can be to those around us is that we can bring the gospel, is that we can speak and share and tell people about Jesus. That's the biggest blessing of all that we have, the news of the gospel, which we can share with a dying and lost world. Well, verse 29, Jacob is about to die, but one final round of blessings need to be handed out by Jacob to his family before he dies and before his descendants, God's people continue their 400-year journey and days of wandering in Egypt.

[32:34] Well, we don't know how long it will be until we die or how long it'll be until Jesus comes and makes all things new. But until either of those things happen and our wandering days are done, dear friends, may we remember that God is with us, that he calls us to live distinctively and to remember who God is and that he is a God who loves to bless his people. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, indeed, we do pray that you would bless us and watch over us as we pilgrim and journey through this world, fix our eyes on heaven, knowing that in Christ you will surely see us safely home.

And in all that we have ahead this week, days where we will feel as strangers, Lord, help us to know you're with us. Help us to live distinctively and help us to know you want to bring the blessings of the gospel to all. So may we be bold to trust you, to speak of you, to love you, both this week and all our days until you bring us safely home. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.