

Reading: Genesis 46:1-7; 26 & 27

Subject: Moving out and on.

We have seen how Joseph was made known to his brothers, of the emotions at that time and all he promised to do for them. We noted that Pharaoh was in agreement with all he proposed. It would have been a hard father not to have been moved at such news that the 11 brothers had taken back to him. Jacob was at first overwhelmed by such news, but then gets ready to go down and see Joseph with all his family - children, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, all their cattle and goods (46:5 & 6). Jacob was changing his life situation and was moving out and was moving on in his life and his walk with God. The Lord can move us out and on in our lives if He knows it is for our best and so there are important lessons for us to learn here from this incident in Jacob's life:

1. Onward.

As Jacob began his journey, he knew he was leaving behind a way of life he would not return to. His words on believing the news about Joseph anticipated this **45:28**. Jacob was going onward to a new and different situation. Reading Jacob's life it seems he was forever being uprooted and moving from one place to the other - from Esau to Laban: then from Laban to Canaan and now from Canaan to Egypt. Yet Canaan was the Promised Land - promised to Abraham, Isaac, to Jacob and his descendants, but Jacob is going from it.

The situation was such that it was right to go, to leave the place he had hoped, even thought he'd settled into. The new journey and prospects became attractive compared to the bleak and dismal past and present. There in Egypt was the opportunity for a new start, a new life, a new joy he had never imagined to have again with his beloved Joseph.

Are we ready to move onward? How do we react when changes are forced upon us, when we seemed settled and events shake up our little lives, when our comfort, security and our dreams seem shaken apart? We all resent change to a greater or lesser extent, especially when we may not have any or little say in the matter. It is easier to adapt to change when we are younger, but Jacob was 130 years old and having to uproot and go away from all he held dear and close and also go against ingrained ideas.

Can I ask a question to us all, especially to those who are the older ones among us? Are we ready for a change of life? If we are not a Christian, does the idea of being converted, changed, born-again by God cause in our heart fear, bewilderment and resentment? Yet God needs to do that, for if not one day our life must change - to death and then our eternal condition is forever fixed. It is better the turmoil and change of life now in conversion than an eternal torment later.

Jacob's moving onward is a challenge to us even if we are Christians, young or old. Are we willing for the Lord to lead us? He can lead us in unexpected ways. As Christians we are never to remain static. One motto in the Reformation - especially under Luther and Calvin, was "*The Church reformed, but always reforming*". As individuals, as a local church we're not to be static and stagnating, but always alive, always reforming. The static Christian or church can sadly become cold, lifeless and largely ineffective. We are never to imagine we've arrived; never to base our way forward on tradition alone - as good a tradition as it may be, but we must be constantly seeking God's leading through His word, to see how the Lord would have us move ahead as individuals or a church. The Lord may have surprises ahead for us.

Perhaps someone here knows they have been playing at Christianity - yes born-again, but been running from God either openly or secretly and perhaps God has been challenging them to move on and to come back to Him and to go onward with Him. Often God will hedge in such a person, will hedge us in to force us, to cause us to realise that there is only one way we can go. God wants us all to move onward in the Christian life; even into the Christian life to start with. We like Jacob, as we consider these things, we can have:

2. Uncertainty.

It might seem strange that he was going to go to Egypt. His grandfather Abraham had undergone bad experiences there; his father Isaac had been forbidden from going there, but it was quite clear God had made provision, through Joseph, to provide not only for him, but also all his family. Was it right for Jacob to move on down to Egypt? Yes he may have been old, may have heard of Egypt as a place not to go, but God was clearly

moving him on from where he was settled in Canaan. Providence was forcing him to leave and as hard as it was going to be, what lay ahead was a joyous prospect - to see and be with Joseph and we can only imagine the joy, the excitement that must have been in Jacob's heart at this thought; he was also promised security, Joseph near and all the family cared for.

It is so easy for us to read providences wrongly and use them to go against God's revealed will simply because we consider the circumstances are favourable to what we would like to do, that these things move and excite us. We are not to go against God's revealed will in the Bible because we consider the circumstances alone and in isolation. We in our lives can have times when we are uncertain of what path we are to take, how our life is to move on in terms of career, Christian service and for the young people those choices are multiplied in so many areas – courses, places of study, boy/girl friend etc. So we like Jacob are to move away from circumstances, providences alone and look:

3. Upward.

Jacob sets out to go down to Egypt, we don't know where he was in the land, probably from Hebron where he settled in chapter 35, but he goes via Beersheba,. Why did he stop here and make sacrifices? It was here that God had been called on by Abraham (21:33), as did Isaac (26:25), it was here that God appeared to Isaac and promised to bless him and his descendants (26:23 & 24). It was from here that Jacob himself had set off to Paddan Aram to get away from Esau (28:10) and he probably remembered how God had met with him on that journey as he went to save his life, find a wife and have a family. Now he was going again to preserve not only his life, but the life of all his family. He stopped here at Beersheba, because he had an eye to God.

Yes he wanted to go, it seemed right, yet he knew Isaac had been prevented from going, so Jacob now offers sacrifices and no doubt seeks God's will in this matter, as well as thanking Him for His mercy of the news of Joseph. Jacob praises God in those sacrifices and no doubt seeks further help and mercy. He had been promised security, Joseph near and all the family being cared for. Yet it would appear that he was uncertain whether this really was God's will for him.

None of us know 100% what the details of our ongoing lives are going to be. We can make plans that we feel are God's way forward for us or the church, but we don't know if those are absolutely certain and fixed for us. The Lord may turn our little or big plans upside down and inside out and take us in a completely different direction. Proverbs 3:5 & 6 are such important verses and principles to note and apply ***“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”*** We like Jacob need to have our place and times to look upward to learn of God and His will and way for us as we go daily in His way revealed to us by His word. The Lord does guide, direct and lead His people and we see Jacob had:

4. Assurance.

God was very gracious to Jacob and gives him, it would seem after many years, a further vision in the night (v2-4). At this crucial point in Jacob's life God encourages him and gives him an assurance as He had done years earlier at Bethel when he was about to leave Canaan for Haran. This gracious and divine message gave Jacob assurance in three ways:

Firstly: Of who God is - *"I am God, the God of your father,"* so Jacob knew that this God was still with and caring for him.

Secondly: God directly calms his fear - *"Do not fear to go down to Egypt."* God knew his fear, even the fear which arose out of his concern not to go against divine purposes concerning the land of promise. He had been encouraged by God to believe that Canaan was his country (32:9) and he may well have feared leaving it.

Thirdly: God gave him 4 promises -

The first was the assurance that they would be made into a great nation there in Egypt.

The second was that God would go with him into Egypt; God had given Jacob a similar reassurance when he was leaving Canaan for Haran those many years before (28:15).

The third promise was that God would bring him up again - this is not just God addressing Jacob as an individual and promising that he would be buried in Canaan, but that also his descendants would be brought out of Egypt - harking back to the promise made to Abraham (15:12-16).

The fourth promise was that Joseph would put his hand upon his eyes - this means that Joseph would be with him when he died. God was most kind to Jacob and assured him that he would die contented, with his favourite son at his side to perform the final loving act of making sure his eyelids were closed and his body buried.

The recording starts here:

Armed with this threefold assurance of God's promises and word from God, Jacob sets off for Egypt. We all need our Beersheba's - those places and times where God meets with us. I'm not talking about night visions, ecstatic experiences etc. The first place is Calvary - there we need to see the one and only sacrifice made for sin, our sin. We need to be ever coming back there, not for salvation, that is given once and for all the moment we believe, but to help us keep a right perspective on life and events. As we move on in life, often in a busy life, we need to be aware of our Saviour's love often, that we live our lives for Him and to please Him. So as He leads us in a new area, into new spheres of service, even further in the existing ways we are in, we need to be in constant touch with Him. Yet we often must come back to remind ourselves of what our Saviour has done for us there at Calvary.

Whatever God's plan is for our life He will lead and guide us one step is a time - from A to B, B to C etc. Only as we obey are we assured of his full blessing. Jacob was promised God's presence in this new adventure in faith. Only as we walk in His ways are we sure of His presence of blessing - not health, wealth and prosperity, but His smile, help and presence. Even if our way seem hard and difficult God has promised to be with us in the worst trials and calamities Isaiah 43:2 & 3a ***"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour;"*** or as CH2 612 v4 & 5 says

***'When through the deep waters I cause you to go,
the rivers of grief shall not you overflow;
for I will be with you, your troubles to bless,
and sanctify to you your deepest distress.***

***'When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie,
my grace all-sufficient shall be your supply;
the flame shall not hurt you: I only design
your dross to consume, and your gold to refine.***

You see our loving Lord and Saviour is with us and can use even the bad, strange, confusing and hurting providences of life to make us more holy, pure, godly and Christ-like. God is not content to give us merely an easy life, He wants us prepared for glory and He never gives up on us - in our young years, in middle age and in old age and Jacob was still being lovingly shaped when 130 years old! There is both a warning and encouragement for us all!

Jacob coming to Beersheba also may have had an essence of getting right with God. For 22 years he could have been bitter, hurt, self-pity, moaning that all was against him - in fact it seems as if his faith had shrivelled, was joyless, dry, barren and perhaps he even doubted God's love and goodness. He could have held onto bitterness and resentment against God because Joseph had been killed why hadn't God stopped it?

How like us he was! He was a real human believer, not a superhuman, not isolated from doubts, fears and emotions, but he was a real man. God dealt with him and I feel that here Jacob at Beersheba renews his vows, his faith and acknowledges God publicly as his God. We can see how gracious God is to him as He encourages him immediately that night. For us all let us renew our vow of love and commitment to the Saviour even this evening. May we daily renew our vow of allegiance to the Lord Jesus. That we would say with Philip Doddridge [CH2 525v5]:

***High heaven, that heard the solemn vow,
that vow renewed shall daily hear,
till in life's latest hour I bow,***

and bless in death a bond so dear.

Then let us, whether that vow is made for the first time as we accept the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and give our life to Him, or for the umpteenth time, be like Jacob and take our journey onward **with all that we have**. It is a conscious committing of our whole lives and future into his hands, for Him to lead, to guide, to use us when, where and how he sees fit.

The Methodists have a covenant service drawn up by John Wesley and they quote the words of the Puritan Richard Alleine:

***I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,
exalted for you, or brought low for you;
let me be full, let me be empty,
let me have all things, let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessèd God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours.
And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.***

I wonder if we are serious to move on with God. I'm not saying change is always necessary, but if God were clearly leading us on in our lives, dare we resist? For those of us who are not Christians whether young or old, realise that God would have us trust the Lord Jesus as our own Lord and Saviour and He wants you to put your life, with no holding back, into His hands and control. For those of us who have trusted Jesus as Saviour, we need to realise again it is as Lord and Saviour we trusted Him. There can be no clinging on to our old way of life, no let out clauses, no ifs or buts or exceptions. It must be all for Him. Jacob set out with all that was his (46:1). There was no turning back, or looking back. Total enjoyment of the Christian life means total commitment to Christ and His ways. We are to remember Lot's wife and not to look back as we plough the furrow of our life.

Yet as we do God's will, it will be our pleasure. Jacob had no doubt the joy he anticipated - seeing and being with Joseph. God in a like manner blesses our life and work for Him with countless joys and blessings on the way; but then one day we are guaranteed to see our Lord Jesus. We don't see Him now, yet we love and serve Him. One glorious day we will see Him and He will welcome us and what great joy it would be to hear Him say "*Well done you good and faithful servant.*"

What a hope, a certain hope, a joy set before us. May we press on, onwards to serve and obey our great God and Saviour wherever He may lead us.