

Place: Lurgan Baptist 16:5:2010

## **GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD**

Readings: Genesis 46:1-7, 26-34 47:9

### **10. A PILGRIM'S PROGRESS**

During the course of his life, the author of Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan, was imprisoned under Charles 11. If Bunyan had been willing to sign a statement that he would not preach in public, he would have been released from prison. *He was incarcerated for twelve years, but he could have been freed any day if he had agreed to the terms.* During those twelve years he had a dependant wife and little children. One of his daughters was a little girl by the name of Mary, and she was blind. In the dungeon, Bunyan often thought of his poor, little Mary, and his heart would almost break. *"What sorrow, thou art likely to have in this world, my poor blind one. Oh, Mary thou may go hungry and naked and beg in the streets, be beaten and starved and I cannot do anything for thee."* Well, Bunyan remained in prison, and he committed all his concerns blind Mary included to the keeping of God. It was toward end of his imprisonment that he wrote that glorious passage.

*Unless I am willing to pluck out my eyes and let the blind lead me, then God Almighty being my witness and defence, if it shall please Him to let frail life last that long, the moss shall grow on my eyebrow before I surrender my principles or violate my conscience.*

John Bunyan lived like this because he realized that he wasn't here to stay. In the words of his classic book, *"Pilgrim's Progress,"* Bunyan realized that he was a pilgrim. Is this not how the Bible describes us? *"Strangers and pilgrims."* (1 Pet 2:11) My .... *"This world is not our home we're just a passing through."* Our citizenship is in heaven. We belong to a higher realm so lets not get bogged down in a lower level. Is this not how old Jacob perceived himself? We notice that twice over he uses the word *"pilgrimage,"* to express his idea of his own life and the life of his fathers. He says to Pharaoh, *"The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years."* (47:9) To him life had been a journey, with a starting point and a goal, and it is this aspect of life as a pilgrimage which enabled Jacob to invest it with a sacred and special significance.

Now the primary character in this portion of the drama is Jacob rather than Joseph, but it's important that we follow Jacob at this point because he is about to move to Egypt to reunited with Joseph. So this .... I want to talk to you about **"A Pilgrims Progress,"** from three scenes in the life of Jacob. Notice, from the context Jacob the pilgrim,

#### **(1) FACING CHANGE: RELOCATION**

How would you feel if tomorrow morning your boss handed you a notice that your job was being transferred to Madrid and you have to relocate in one month? How would you retired folks like to be told that you can't live where you are living any longer, that you have to pack your belongings and leave the country, move to France

and live the rest of your lives there ? *That would be pretty traumatic for most of us.* You see, change is not easy. We like for things to continue as they are. At a college reunion, thirty years after graduation, one man said to another, “ *Do you see that fellow over there ? Well, he’s got so bald and so fat he didn’t even recognize me.* ” We don’t like change, yet we all have to face change. We change communities, we change jobs, and we change churches. Fellows doesn’t marriage bring a tremendous change ? Having children sure changes things doesn’t it ? At a later stage we have to retire and move into a new lifestyle. Old landmarks change, friends die, and the future seems bleak. Nothing remains the same very long. Even today’s software technology is by passed by better technology tomorrow. *Does all this change frighten you ? Well, here is Jacob at 130 years of age and he facing change.* He is being asked to move from his simple, rural, monotheistic lifestyle in Canaan into the sophisticated and polytheistic lifestyle of Egypt with all the temptations that would bring ? *How does he face change ?*

**(a) WITH PRAISE:**

Look if you will at ( 46:1 ) On his way down to Egypt he stopped at Beersheba, a place that was rich with significance for Jacob’s family. Do you recall that it was at Beersheba that Abraham had received a special revelation of God ? ( 21:33 ) It was here that he lived after the offering of Isaac. ( 22:19 ) Do you remember that it was here at Beersheba that Isaac his father lived ? ( 26:24 ) Indeed this was the very place where Jacob had spent his childhood ( 28:10 ) and no doubt held many

wonderful memories for him. We can well imagine why he stopped at Beersheba. *He would never visit there again.* You would think that Jacob would have been somewhat depressed, and despondent leaving Canaan but instead of weeping he built an altar and worshipped the Lord. *The others must have wondered why Jacob was stopping at Beersheba when so much was waiting for him in Egypt ? Wasn’t Jacob eager to see his son Joseph again ? He was, but Jacob stopped because he was a sinner in need of pardon, a pilgrim in need of guidance, a worshipper in need of God.* The Bible says, “ *He offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac.* ” ( 46:1 ) What a beautiful act of worship that must have been. Jacob certainly had much reason to give thanks. His beloved son, Joseph, whom he thought dead was alive and was Lord over all of Egypt. Tell me, how do you face change ? When God brings change into your life, what do you do ? Do you grumble, gripe, or complain ? Or do you “ *offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name ?* ” ( Heb 13:15 ) My .... we can change with contentment when we face it with praise and thanksgiving.

Dr. Philips Brooks once had a British preacher preach for him in his church in Boston. After the service the guest preacher lost his way back to the hotel. He asked for help from a man who turned out to be blind, but the blind man insisted he knew the way and could help. Ten minutes later they arrived at the hotel. The preacher kindly thanked him. The blind man said, “ *I am thankful for my blindness, because I have so much time for meditation.* ”

*There will be time enough in heaven for me to see everything.*” How does Jacob face change ? (a)

**(b) WITH PERCEPTION:**

For it was here at Beersheba that Jacob perceived the will of God for his life. Do you see what God says ? ( 46:2-3 ) ? You see, old Jacob had learned some hard lessons about what had happened when he did not talk with God and walk with God. **Therefore, he wanted to be sure that God was in this move.** The Lord had once appeared in a vision to Isaac his father and specifically commanded him not to go to Egypt. ( 26:2 ) Because Jacob was aware of that command he was concerned lest his desire to be reunited with Joseph would put him in a place of disobedience to God. For Jacob, even the passionate concerns of family were subservient to the clear mandate of God. Only when God was in it did he make the move. Now remember he was no spring chicken. According to this passage he has reached the age of 130. No doubt stooped and wrinkled, snow white hair and a matching long beard he was of the age that many of you would consider ***“too old for a move like that.”*** Says who ? Is this not why old Jacob impresses us here ? He wasn't afraid of a challenge, just as long as he knew the Lord was in it.

My .... making a major move can be one of the most insecure times we ever face in life. Pulling up roots in one place and trying to put them down in another can not only be fearful but depressing. That's why we need to pause here and understand the value of Jacob listening for the

voice of God. Is that what you are doing ? Are you facing change this .... ? Is it a geographical change, a move from one home to another ? Is it a domestic change, a move from being single to married ? Is it a career change, a move from one position to another ? Is it a change that will take you from secular work into the Lord's work in a full time capacity ? Tell me, have you paused for a while that you might hear God's voice ? My .... as His people we're to listen to His voice and ask, ***“Is God in this ? Does this contemplated move please God ? Have I got God's approval for this ?”*** Can you not hear old Jacob ? *“ Lord, I have been told that my beloved son is in Egypt and that we have been promised a life of ease and plenty if we go there. I know he wants me to come. And I long to see him again. But Lord God of my forefathers, are you there ? Are you in this ?”* (a) (b)

**(c) WITH PROMISE:**

That was why he was able to go through this major transition with tranquility, because he had a promise from God. Look if you will ( 46:3-4 ) Did you notice it was only after sacrifice was made that God spoke mightily to His servant ? To the believer who draws close to God, the Lord has much to say. What did He say to Jacob. Well notice, there was,

**1. A Word of Confidence:**

*“ I am God, the God of thy father.”* ( 46:3 ) Why did God identify Himself like that ? He did so because He was saying, *“ Jacob, I was faithful to your father Isaac, all the*

*days of his life and I will be faithful to you.*” I wonder in that change that frightens you, do you need to be reminded of the changeless character of God ?

### **2. A Word of Consolation:**

Jacob is apprehensive about making this move ? Is he forfeiting the Promised Land by leaving it ? Is he making a mistake ? God banishes all his fears with a timely word of cheer, “*fear not to go down.*” Is fear holding you back from the move that God wants you to make ?

### **3. A Word of Commitment:**

Why go down to Egypt ? “*For there I will make of thee a great nation.*” ( 46:3 ) Just as Joseph had to take Mary and the Lord Jesus for a time into Egypt, so now that country will provide protection for the emerging nation of Israel. Do you recall how many went down ? Seventy ? Do you recall how many came out ? About two million.

### **4. A Word of Comfort:**

“*I will go down with thee .... and I will .... bring thee up again.*” This is why Jacob could face this big change in his life. He had the promise of God in his heart. Abraham journeyed to an unknown land with peace, because he had the promise of God in his heart. Joshua fought battles with fearlessness because he had the promise of God in his heart. Paul faced death with great anticipation because he

had the promise of God in his heart. I wonder has a major change interrupted your life ? Are you fearful of the move that God wants you to make ? Well listen to His promises ? *The Promise of Strength:* “*Our sufficiency is of God.*” ( 2 Cor 3:5 ) *The Promise of Provision:* “*My God shall supply all your need .....*” ( Phil 4:19 ) *The Promise of Companionship:* “*I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.*” ( Heb 13:5 ) Jacob the pilgrim, (1)

## **(2) FEELING EMOTION: REUNION**

Can you picture this scene ? I mean Joseph had been waiting for this glorious day. He had been imagining this reunion for over twenty two years. Did he pace his chamber at night, wondering if his brothers would return ? *Did he agonize over whether his father would still be alive when they got back to Canaan ? And if were alive would old Jacob believe them and return with him ?* And what about Jacob ? Can you fathers not identify with the feelings that must have been stirring in Jacob’s heart ? I can recall in 1983 coming home from South Africa. I was away for almost two months preaching all over that great country. I had been anticipating a reunion with my family for many days and as I boarded the flight at Heathrow for Aldergrove, that anticipation was heightening as I visualized the prospect of reunion ? Do you know what it is like ? Checking your watch again and again, as you anticipate the end of the journey and the joy of reunion. My .... what it must have been like for old Jacob after 22 years ? You see,

***(a) What is Portrayed here is a Paternal Reunion:***

Jacob as a father reunited with his son Joseph. Do you see how the Bible puts it ? ( 46:29 ) What a moment. After more than two decades, Jacob once more held the son that he had given up for dead. After all he had been through, Joseph, embraced his aging father. He could feel the bones across his back as he held the old man in his arms. How long it had been. How much he had missed him. There the two men stood staring into each other eyes. Weeping one moment, laughing the next. *What a wonderful family reunion.* Now there's a word here we need to notice. It's the word "*presented.*" ( 46:29 ) Keil states "*this is a translation of a Hebrew word generally used only of the appearance of God, it is selected here to indicate the glory in which Joseph came to meet his father.*" You see, Joseph appeared in his robes of glory, riding his chariot of honour. This was not pride on his part. This was the desire of a son showing his beloved father that he had behaved in a way that would please and honour him. ***What a contrast Joseph was from his ten brothers.*** They had brought shame to their father, he had brought honour. They had brought disgrace, he had brought delight. They had brought misery, he had brought ministry.

Do you know what Proverbs says ? "*A wise son maketh a glad father.*" ( Prov 10:1 ) Nothing makes a godly parents joy greater than the spiritual success of a son or daughter. Nothing makes a godly parents heart break more than the spiritual shipwreck of a willful child. Young folk, are you honouring your parents by your moral choices ? Parents are you helping your children by your godly example ? (a)

***(b) What is Pre-figured here is an Eternal Reunion:***

Indeed seventeen years later when Jacob was dying he said, "*I am to be gathered unto my people, bury me with my fathers,*" ( 49:29 ) He told his sons he was going home to be reunited with his people. He was heading for a reunion with his grandfather Abraham, his father Isaac, his dear Rachel. The writer to the Hebrews says, "*These all died in faith,*" desiring a better country. ( Heb 11:13 ) Paul says, "*For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*"

( 1 Thes 4:16-17 ) How delightful is the word "together." Separation is the order of this day. Reunion is the order of that day. Now we are not together. Some of you have empty homes. Loved ones have been called home. Half of your heart is in heaven, but there's a day of reunion coming. Can you think of loved ones on the other side and their parting at the river at the river you recall ? My .... We will see them, know them, and be with them for all eternity. Paul says, "*For now we see through a glass darkly but then face to face.*" ( 1 Cor 3:12 )

***On that bright and golden morning when the Son of Man shall come, And the radiance of His glory we shall***

***see,***

***When from every clime and nation He shall call His people home, What a gathering of the ransomed that will be.***

On that **“great getting up morning,”** we’ll be reunited forever in the presence of our adorable Lord. My .... will you be there ? Will your whole family be there ? Will the circle be unbroken by and by ? Jacob, the pilgrim (1) (2)

### **(3) FOCUSING MINDS: REFLECTION**

Do you recall again his words to Pharaoh ? “ *The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years.* ” ( 47:9 ) Jacob was simply saying, “ *This is a nice place Joseph has given me, but I’m not staying here, I’m on my way to the home of my fathers.* ” Do you see what he is doing ? He is focusing minds not on the temporal, but on the eternal, not on the secular but on the spiritual, not on this world, but on the world to come. Now he does that here in this passage in three ways. Notice for example Jacob,

#### ***(a) RECOGNISES GOD’S PROVIDENCE:***

“ *And Israel said unto Joseph now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive.* ” ( 46:30 ) Jacob was not requesting to die at that moment. He lived another seventeen years. He was expressing in a figure of speech how great was his joy at the reunion with Joseph, and how satisfied he was, though his life like ours, was often a puzzle to him. My .... we have often no explanation for life’s disappointments, failures, and even its joys. But can we look at all of that and say, “ *I am satisfied,* ” in the face of the puzzles. You see, seeing Joseph after more than twenty years of separation did not all answer all of Jacob’s questions, but the patriarch was no longer worried

about them. He was content as he learned to leave God to order all his ways and trust him whatever happened. Are you ? Can you say, “ *Father I am satisfied in You, even though life is often a puzzle to me.* ” (a)

#### ***(b) REALISES GOD’S PLAN:***

You see, God’s plan was tied up in God’s man, Joseph. If Jacob and his family had stayed in Canaan, they would have been absorbed into the culture. The Canaanites were the most vile pagan people who ever walked this earth. They were so bad that 400 years later when God called Israel back to the promised land, He ordered their total annihilation. So God had Israel settle for a time, in the land of Goshen, the best land in Egypt, protected and isolated. *They would be under the protection of Joseph, the most powerful man in the kingdom.* God knew exactly what He was doing and old Jacob realizes that God’s plan was perfect. Do you see what Joseph did to keep his father safe and secure ?

#### **1. Joseph gave him Position:**

He located Jacob in Goshen, isolated, fertile, ideal for the family to grow, and yet to stay together. Can you imagine saying, “ *Let me show where you are going to live. Look at this view, look at the house I’ve built for you. Isn’t this nice Dad ?* ”

#### **2. Joseph gave him Possessions:**

Jacob's family now had possession of the best piece of property on which to shepherd. ( 47:11 )

### 3. Joseph gave him Provisions:

“ *And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household with bread, according to their families.*” ( 47:12 ) He took care of everyone's needs, acting almost as father would to a son. Joseph is a wonderful example of providing for one's family, caring for his Dad. Do you use every opportunity to repay the kindness and love of your parents ? Do you care for them ? Think of all their sacrifices for you. Wouldn't it be the greatest joy in life to sacrifice for them ? ( 1 Tim 5:8 )

#### **(c) REPRESENTS GOD'S PERSPECTIVE:**

What is God's perspective ? Seeing ourselves as pilgrims. Do you know what Joseph gave to Jacob ? The prime site in the land of Egypt. Do you know what Jacob said to Joseph, “ *I love the prime site, but I love even more my pilgrim status.*” Many Christians who come to their version of Goshen fall in love with the place so much they get all tied up in it and start living like they're going to be there forever. I say again “ *This world is not our home, I'm just a passing through.*” But are you and I living as though it were ? Are you more concerned with the now than with the then ? With the material rather than the spiritual, with the temporal rather than the eternal, with the passing rather than the permanent ?

*A few more marchings weary, then we'll gather home  
A few more storm clouds dreary, then we'll gather home  
O'er time's raid river soon we'll rest forever  
A few more marchings weary, then we'll gather home*

This is the progress of a pilgrim. And here we see Jacob as a pilgrim (1) (2) (3) Like Jacob our pilgrimage will soon be over. ( 49:33 ) And

*Bye and bye when we look on His face  
We'll wish we had given Him more*

When Bishop Cassels first went out to China as one of the Cambridge seven he had these words stuck on every piece of luggage and evidently to his heart. Do you know what they were ? “ **God first.**”