

Genesis 46:1-4 Fear Doesn't Stop Us 11/18/18

So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. ² And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." ³ 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. ⁴ 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."

(Pastor prays)

The Apostle John tells us that perfect love casts out fear. That's something the old patriarch Jacob needed to learn. As we approach the end of Genesis and the odyssey of Joseph, we see Joseph's father Jacob, preparing to leave Canaan and go down to Egypt. And although the reunion with Joseph will be a happy one and they will survive the famine, we read in this story that Jacob is like many of you. He is anxious, anxious about what's next. He's fearful for the future, and although he believes in God, he's not confident in God, and really that's where faith is exercised the most. He's not confident that the future is going to be okay. You are not confident that you are going to be okay and that your family is going to be okay. And although Joseph has good reason to be happy, he knows Joseph is alive, he's letting his fears override his joy.

But the truth is there were legitimate reasons for Jacob to be afraid. For one, he's old, and it's hard to make a move when you are old. And to Egypt. Egypt is a pagan country, plus Egypt is a dark part of this family's past. That's where his grandfather Abraham experienced the darkest part of his life when he lied to Pharaoh about his wife Sarah.

In addition to this, Jacob never really got over the death of his favorite person Rachel. So verse 1 tells us, Israel took his journey, a fearful old man. His bones are brittle, his eyesight is bad and he's still heartbroken. Heartbroken and afraid. So how do you find the way forward when you have to keep going? Like Jacob, you just want to crawl back into a hole in be left alone. How do you take the next step in life when the next step is so frightening? I think this passage speaks to those of us that live with some kind of fear.

God Meets Us in Our Fears and Moves Us Forward

There are two things to focus on in these verses, two things that moved Jacob forward. The first one is worship.

Worship Calms Our Fears

Let's join Jacob in the story in verse one. He and his whole entourage, around 70 people, and all their gypsy paraphernalia, animals and carts and goats and belongings, they all start the journey, and verse one tells us they get to the very edge of the promised land to Beersheba. Beersheba is the place where his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham had worshipped, and notice at the end of verse 1, the description of worship. He offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

A couple of things to reflect on considering Jacob's worship, and then maybe some application.

In verse 1, notice he offered sacrifices. Although the sacrificial system is not yet set up, there is a clear understanding that the blood shed from the animal that is sacrificed symbolizes the atoning and purging of sin. And every sacrifice made from Genesis to Malachi, was a look forward to the cross of Christ. Because finally at the cross of Jesus, the work of sacrifices would be finished.

The cross is the center and security and starting point of worship. It's at the cross of Jesus that sinners are assured that they no longer stand under the awful wrath of God and instead receive the wonderful grace of God. It's not that Christians don't believe in a wrathful God, we do. We just believe that the justice and wrath of God has been satisfied and appeased at the cross of Jesus. Our worship is built on sacrifice. The once and for all sacrifice of Jesus that turns sinners into saints and strangers into family.

Let me tell you why this is vital. It's hard to move forward and be confident when you have a guilty conscience or are steeped in sin. The cross of Jesus is the front door to worship and the solution to our fears. Because of the cross, we have nothing to be afraid of. You will also notice in verse 1, he worshipped the God of his father Isaac. There wasn't anything theologically innovative here. He worships the same God that has been worshipped from the very beginning, which is a great reminder for us.

When we doubt God's goodness or His ability to get us through the next step, remember He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. And for New Testament believers, it's why it's so important to be a part of a congregation. Some of your brothers and sisters in Christ are fighting the same battles that you are. When Paul talks about worship in Ephesians 5:19, he reminds us that we aren't just singing to the Lord. He says that we are *addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and*

making melody to the Lord with your heart. So how does corporate worship calm fear? It soothes my anxiety as I celebrate the goodness of God. It prepares my heart to hear from God. It convicts me of sin and washes me with grace. And it affirms in my heart what I know in my head, that God is good and in control and I am not alone in this world. Worship, then, is a confession of faith, a statement of belief. It is an act of obedience, a call for help and then an exercise in trust. God meets us in our fears and moves us forward. Worship calms our fears and sets us up to hear from God. Now here is our next point.

God Promises Remove Our Fears

Verse 2 tells us that God spoke to Jacob and called him by name. Twice, like with Abraham in the past and Samuel in the future, Jacob answers with the obedient, “Here I am.” Now in verses 3 - 4, there are truths and promises that are ours in Christ, and I want to spend the next few moments talking through them and pointing them out. You will need to do some of the work of application yourself as we see these promises and truth. Let's go.

In verse 3, God says “I am God. I am in control I am sustainer, creator, redeemer and savior. There is not one molecule of this earth that I am not in control of and not one problem you are facing that I can't get you through. I am God.” Sometimes you just need to think about the God-ness of God and the rest of the awful security that He is in control.

We've been talking about Joseph since Labor Day weekend, and in the prevailing theme has been God's Providence, that God is sovereignly working at His perfect plan and no problem on Earth or demon in Hell can stop the perfect will of our good God. You need to remember, He is God and, if you are in Christ, He is your God. Verse 3 tells us: do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you a great nation. This is a promise: Go to Egypt. I am doing something in this struggle and in fact this is a fulfillment of what God told Abraham back in Genesis 15:13. *Then the LORD said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.* Look with me again at verse 3. *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.* “There”, I will make you a great nation.

There is an emphasis on the word “there.” God didn't make Israel a great nation in Canaan but He took them down into Egypt. And there in Egypt, God's people would learn the discipline of serving and they would mature through suffering. Egypt is the crucible that God used to forge and form His people.

You need to remember that when God takes you down to Egypt, He has you there to form you into the image and likeness of Christ.

Let's keep reading in verse 4. *I myself will go down with you to Egypt.* God will be Jacob's escort as he goes south to Egypt. This reminds us that God's presence doesn't eliminate pain, but it does assure provision and protection in pain.

Listen, forget the trouble you're in. Let me ask you, is there any greater promise in scripture than the promise of God's personal presence? This changes the whole dynamic. Where we are doesn't matter so much as who is there with us! What we are in doesn't matter so much as who is there with us. I myself will go down with you but don't leave out the back end of this promise. In verse 4 it says, *I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again,* There in verse 4, in embryonic form, is the story of redemption and the foundation of our confidence. It's the cycle of redemption and the hope of our salvation.

Paul would say it again like this in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.* The promise is a promise of redemption and resurrection and reconciliation. All our fears, high and low, north and south, are met and conquered in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. It's time to stop carrying them around and bring those fears to the cross of Jesus.

(Pastor prays)