

**<sup>9</sup>Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers.”**

We have come to the end of a fascinating glimpse into the lives of very ordinary people working out what it means to know God and be involved with Him, sharing their burdens guiding their steps, belonging to Him, heart and mind and soul. For Jacob nearing the end of his life and now at last re-united with his son Joseph it is an opportunity to look back and make some kind of assessment of what he has achieved. That can be a most uncomfortable experience and I think you can hear his reservations. ***My years have been few and difficult,***

If you were to look back over your own life I wonder what you would pick out as significant. Would it be the good times or the troubled ones and would you be able to say that through everything God was present in it. As Joseph presents 5 of his brothers and his father to Pharaoh he is able to bear witness to the care God had shown to him and to the family. Now formally received into Egypt they've been saved from famine and starvation, saved from the guilt and shame of their past, saved from the deep divisions in their family and saved from the spiritual wilderness. Now they are to live safely, protected, provided for, respected and yet separated from the pagan influence of Egyptian culture in the fertile land of Goshen in the Nile Delta. Although the road has been rough and hard they can recognise the hand of God with them even in the darkest moments and the outcome has been beyond their wildest dreams.

When God blesses it is overwhelming. Even when they were under His Judgement there is no doubt now, looking back that He was with them, even when difficulties and tragedy threatened to break their hearts He was there.

Even when they knew themselves to be far from Him; their lives bleak and desolate, their prayers abandoned and their worship non-existent He had never, not for a single moment, let them go. When the brothers plotted in secret to destroy their brother, God was there. When they stood before their father and lied to him and when Jacob cried out in mortal anguish at the supposed death of his favourite son, God was there. When Joseph languished in prison, falsely accused and forgotten, God was there. Ps 139: <sup>7</sup> ***Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,*** <sup>10</sup> ***even there your hand will guide me,***

***your right hand will hold me fast. <sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," <sup>12</sup> even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day.***

In times of despair and trouble for us we need to remind ourselves how God dealt with these folk so long ago, led them through the valley of the shadow of death so that we might say in our turn ***"I will fear no evil for Thou art with me, Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me!"***

That was the experience of Joseph and his brothers but when Jacob looks back over his life, you can hear in his voice pangs of regret. ***My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers.***

There's a sense of waste in those words. From early days when he wrestled with God before finally yielding to him there had been years when there was little worship in their house. As long as life trundled along smoothly enough it didn't seem to matter but below the surface suspicion, jealousy, anger and hate were bubbling away almost unnoticed until it burst forth. They had been able to live on the legacy of the faith and understanding of his forefathers. The foundations had been there but without an ongoing relationship with God through prayer and the constant challenge of His word they had lost their way and when you read some of what they got up to you in the chapters we didn't look at you can see all kinds of evil that was allowed to flourish.

In many homes today that is exactly the story where families came to worship, maybe when the kids were small but then the busy-ness of life crowded in, suddenly there were so many other things they wanted to do and they got out of the way of it. No one thought that there was any harm in it but years later we may look back with many regrets and say, ***"if only..."*** Not even the sweetness of the blessing now being poured out, the forgiveness in the air, the restoration under God can take away that sense of loss that Jacob feels. This is a man who started out with God, got lost along the way and bears an abiding, crushing sense of having missed something. He stands before Pharaoh but he's thinking about God and confesses, my life is not what it might have been! When the story of our lives reaches its final chapters I wonder what we will regret; what might have been or will we see the welcome hand of God sought for, prayed for, heavy at times but nevertheless laid upon our way?

When you go on to the rest of the chapter and what Joseph actually did in Egypt you recognise that this man had the most amazing administrative gifts. He was able to organize

the nationwide collection, storage, maintenance and distribution of vast amounts of Grain. Words like nationalisation, state ownership of supplies, bulk-buying and market forces readily come to mind. Christian Aid could do with him now! The European Union Farming policy with its mountains of unused food and waste could learn a lot from this man and the question is inevitable; if this could be done 4,000 years ago by a man of God in a position of power why not now! Depending on your political views you will look on how he organised it all with different eyes.

The idea seems to have been to protect people by using the Crown or the state to prevent unscrupulous exploitation by big business. He prevented carpetbaggers buying up land or cattle at rock bottom prices from the smallholders or even enslaving them when they had no money to buy food. Joseph was able to take power and use it wisely and carefully under God, The people were kept safe in Egypt and the nations around them but his plan would never have worked with the corrupt bureaucracy that would have existed before.

Single-handedly he changed the face of politics and the civil service introducing honesty and integrity into the system. He had urged people not to live for today, not to be greedy and grasping but to invest in the future and in the poor, to overcome the problems of starvation and not simply to accept them. It is a very long way from modern practices which exist more as a protection for big business and supermarkets to keep their profits up. Joseph's scheme did quite the opposite enabling people to buy food at a time when there would have been none or when inflation was out of control.

This man of God was able to bring to a pagan nation qualities of caring, thrift and integrity they had not known before. Even the pagan world rejoices. "You have saved our lives", they said to Joseph. I think especially in these days that we must pray for Christians in politics or high office that they might be enabled to witness and influence for good and we should never underestimate our own contribution. People get to know where you stand. Faith is something you can't hide and we must hold to that which God has taught us in His Word.

That is not to be in any way harsh or judgemental but gently, lovingly and persuasively allowing the truth of God to shape our lives and our society. That is Joseph's story and it is what made him the instrument of God. He had clung to the promises of God through all kinds of adventures, trials and difficulties.

Now God had proved to Him, and fulfilled in Him all the promises of his love. Joseph had not been able to see how at the time, but had gone on trusting and he was not to be the loser of it until he reigned in glory. When we come to the Easter services and remember the ancient promises of God fulfilled in Jesus but often obscured in our hearts by the trials and

difficulties we face, perhaps we too may be enabled to cling to them with the assurance that the salvation he brought to us in Jesus will be greater far than anything we could ever imagine.

Just as the brothers shared in Joseph's glory as a prince of Egypt and were given a place of honour they did not deserve by his Grace and forgiveness we can share in the glory of the Prince of Peace when we come to Him and live in Him by the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and through his sacrifice on the Cross.

As Jacob, Joseph and the brothers discovered, we wrestle not against flesh but against the principalities and powers that rule the hearts of men and although spiritual battles are often worked out in down-to-earth ways the main concern of the Church or of the Gospel is not just solving the problems of this world but our victory in the world to come. It is difficult in these days to make that plain for our generation does not take Eternity very seriously. It is for many a vague hope and little thought is given as to the way to get there. All kinds of nonsense is spoken, sentimental naive, simplistic notions without a single thought given as to what is God's word on the subject. Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except by me.

It is the way in which God Himself has chosen, the way He has provided for us in His son, the bridge by which we must cross and there is no other.

***<sup>11</sup>So Joseph settled his father and his brothers in Egypt and gave them property in the best part of the land.... <sup>12</sup>Joseph also provided his father and his brothers with food***