

Reading: Genesis 42:1-17

Theme: Famine Relief

Earlier this year we had warnings of major famines happening due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet recently, parts of the world have been hit by floods while neighbouring countries have had severe droughts! We live in amazingly privileged times as aid and help from around the world can be quickly shipped and flown in to provide relief and help.

We have seen how Joseph had told Pharaoh of the 7 years of superabundance which would be followed by 7 years of severe famine. The land had been blessed with the 7 years of plenty, huge grain stores had been built and filled. Then the famine came - not only to Egypt, but to all that part of the world. Due to Joseph's wise plans, Egypt not only had enough grain for themselves, but was able to sell grain to all who came to buy it in the famine.

We first met Joseph as a young man of 17, we are some 21 years later and he is now 37 or 38. He was 30 on his coming to power in Egypt; 7 years of plenty have occurred and the first year of famine is either in progress or has ended with no harvests and the people have an acute shortage of food. He hasn't seen his father or brothers for at least 20 years. As we begin to look at this passage there is much we can learn and apply to our own lives and, if we are not Christians, about our need to go to the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour. I would like us to look at 3 things from v1-6:

1. The dreadful plight.

Jacob, his sons and their families - as all were married with families at this time –were also going through hard times. They were mainly shepherds and cattlemen. They and their animals were dependent upon the grass and grain harvests. No doubt they, had also enjoyed the 7 years of plenty, when they'd never had it so good, but this had ended. Their supplies were right down for they too were affected by the famine. If we had looked at them, they would have had plenty of clothes, nice homes (tents), sustaining some livestock, had plenty of money even, but they lacked the basic necessity of life - grain. There was no grain in Canaan to be bought for love or money.

As Jacob's sons looked around, they could see no hope; may have sat around looking at one another and their families, even complaining about the situation. It seemed hopeless - hunger, starvation and death was all they saw ahead for them. What a dreadful plight - a slow death by starvation and made worse by to having to watch their children, loved ones go through it too.

We would not like to be in such a situation. Yet each of us are in a far more dreadful plight than Jacob and his family, yet we do not realise it. Every one of us was born with a famine in our lives - a total famine of goodness, righteousness and purity. You might object and say *"I'm a good person, a moral person, a fine upstanding character, what do you mean by tarring me with the same brush as others?"* Yes, that may be so, but you have a famine of the goodness, righteousness and purity God requires of you - for it is His goodness, righteousness and purity we need in our lives.

Jacob and his family needed bread to live and we need the Bread of Life - it is He who will supply all our lack and meet our need. Without the Bread of Life, understand that the worst famine on earth cannot compare to our need. Just as Jacob and his sons could not buy the grain they needed, so desperately wanted, neither can we buy, bargain for this Bread of Life. There is nothing we can do to earn it, or to merit it. The Bible even says all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags compared to God's holiness and purity. We are as hopeless beggars with nothing we can bargain with for anything from God.

To change the picture a moment - we are naturally bankrupt before God and insolvent. We have such a need, that even if we could live 1000 lives, we could not pay off any part of our debt to God or improve in any way. Only the infinite God can supply what we lack. No other person can, it is only God who can give us what we need. Without Him we have no hope, not only in terms of life and death, but more importantly regarding eternity, for our life and existence are just a brief blink compared to eternity.

At this moment, without the Bread of Life, we have such a famine in our souls that we can be termed dead to God, dead in all our wrongdoing - in our deeds, words, desires and thoughts and we all fall short of God's holy standards and His awesome glory. Have you realised something of your dreadful plight? Jacob and his sons did, yet our situation is worse, far worse and if it is not resolved in time, we will be in a dreadful plight for all eternity in the most dreadful place called Hell. Moving on we see:

2. The hopeful sight.

In their dreadful situation, their hopeless state, news comes through from passing travellers, from people round about *"Listen there's grain in Egypt!"* Jacob hears this - see v1b-2 - in other words, look, go down, buy some so we can live - this was the hopeful sight. Some might have replied *"Hold on, do you have proof of that?"* *"Well no, but I have heard that there is".* *"It's a long way to Egypt, it may only be foolish talk, vain hope, a fairy-tale."* - like the streets of London being paved with gold in the story and pantomime of Dick Whittington. Perhaps some in the area, even in the family mocked, doubted, putting it down to false information. Yet Jacob on hearing the news, believes, has hope; tells his sons and encourages them that they need not die.

What of us listening? We may be in this dreadful plight mentioned earlier and may or may not realise it, but all seems dark and hopeless deep within your life. As a church we proclaim a message of hope, a message of good news which is that you do not need to remain in such a dreadful plight and perish eternally. There is hope - not in Egypt, not in me, not in this church, but in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not idle talk; a made-up story; a false dream or an illusion, but it is the true and only hope. Read on the website of how some of us came to a personal realisation of this hope.

God has made provision to give salvation to all who go to Him to receive it from Him. It is not only for rich or poor, for the intellectual or unlearned, for the religious or irreligious, for moral or immoral, but for all, whosoever will believe, irrespective of age or standing in the world. All of us need the

salvation provided by God and can have it freely given them by God.

The Bread of Life is offered freely and abundantly to satisfy our needs. The Bread of Life is the Lord Jesus – who He is and what He has accomplished on our behalf. All we preach and teach in the church centres on and around Him. That is why we want to tell of Him - because we were once starving beggars, but we found the Bread of Life and we are telling fellow starving beggars the way to have the One who satisfies our lives completely.

You may feel it is too late for you at your time of life; you have never been bothered; you are too good or feel you are not good enough! You may feel you would never be able to change, there is no hope for you. Listen! There is hope, there is always hope with this God - He has never had a hopeless case e.g. the tax collector knew and experienced God's mercy, as did the dying thief, a religious bigot (Paul), a demon possessed woman, countless millions of "*hopeless cases*" have been given hope and made new by the Lord Jesus. You are not the exception - God gives hopeless cases sure and certain hope!

Our God is not a cold, hard and callous God, but is the God of all hope. There is forgiveness, there is pardon with Him. This is a truth we tell and we want people to hear. If you're aware of your dreadful plight, then see in this holy, pure God, a hopeful sight - He is the God who is merciful, giving us what we do not deserve. Jacob and his sons had this ray of hope,

this news given them, but it meant they had to do something and take action and so we see:

3. The needful flight.

Jacob tells his sons to go quickly down to Egypt, buy grain for them all and they did so. They left their father, Benjamin and their families behind. They didn't know if they'd be received, let alone if they'd be allowed to buy grain, but off they went with their money. We can picture them going through the Sinai desert, using their rations carefully; seeking water where they could until they came to Egypt. Their concerns would have been about their families, their own safety, would they be in time, would they be able to buy, was the rumour true? Then they arrive in Egypt and find it was true! There was food and grain in Egypt - massive store houses full of it, as if someone knew it was going to happen and made preparation and provision for it! Now all they have to do is go to the governor of the land and buy some...

Not only are we to see our desperate plight and situation, but we must go to God - our own needful flight. It may be a humbling process as none of us like to feel we cannot get by under our own steam. We may have to take back proud, haughty words; or come down from the idea that we are good enough. It will involve telling God we cannot match up to His standards - in word, thought, desire or deed. That as nice and as respectable as we feel we are, that we know we are way below what God requires of us. We will have to realise God knows all about our life – secrets, words, deeds, desires and thoughts that not even those closest to us know (*and we are thankful that they do not!*) We recognise such condemns us in

God's sight, even just one wrong word or deed or thought is enough to condemn us. We will have to admit we cannot save ourselves or our loved ones from death, nor from the judgement to come, nor the punishment we deserve from God for falling short of His standards.

To realise such matters is a humbling thing in our lives, but it is so necessary. Until it happens, we will not come to God. Some people recognise it to a greater or lesser extent, but it is a necessary thing. Jacob's sons went humbly to Egypt for grain and they were not even sure if they would be able to buy it, but they went and had their money with them to buy the grain.

Whereas they had their money, their wealth, we are to realise we have nothing with which to buy, trade and bargain with God for the Bread of Life, for salvation. We come to Him, not to do a deal, or to strike a bargain, but as beggars and we bring nothing in our hands which could win Him over to us.

Thankfully we come to the God of mercy. His mercies are not guarded, under lock and key, they are given freely. We come, not as unwanted, but as invited guests - for there is an open invitation to all, *"whosoever will"* - can go to Him freely. More than that, there is an amazing offer made by the Lord Himself - Isaiah 55:1-3; 6 & 7 " *'Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of*

fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.... Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.'"

Have you realised, have you seen God is this welcoming, pardoning God, giving eternal life willingly and freely to all who go to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ! Do not try to bargain with Him – it is an enormous insult and an affront, for He gives it freely and we are to come on His terms alone. If you have done so, but have wandered away from Him, then He invites you back and will restore you to His ways of love and forgiveness.

Jacob's sons went down to Egypt for grain. They went to secure life and they had to go to the Ruler of the land. If we want eternal life, we have to go to the Ruler of all Creation and He will give it freely and willingly to all who trust in the Lord Jesus. May each of us see our need, also see the hope of the gospel of the Lord Jesus and go to Him alone for such salvation. I would urge you using Isaiah's words to seek the Lord while He may be found, call on Him while He is near.