

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

Theme: Moving out and on.

We saw how Joseph made himself known to his brothers, of their emotions and all he promised to do for them. We noted Pharaoh was in agreement with all he proposed. It would have been a hard father not to have been moved at such news 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 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 to Canaan and now to Egypt. Yet Canaan was the Promised Land - promised to Abraham, Isaac, to Jacob and his descendants, but Jacob was going from it.

The situation was such that it was right to go, even though he'd settled there. The new journey and prospects became attractive compared to the bleak and dismal past and present. For in Egypt was the opportunity for a new start, a new life and joy he 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 and our comfort, security and dreams seem shaken apart? We can 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 and had to uproot and leave all he held dear.

Can I ask a question to us all, especially to those who are older ones among us? Are we ready for a change of life? If we are not a Christian, does the idea of being converted, born-again by God cause in your heart fear, bewilderment and resentment? Yet God needs to do that, for if not one day our life must change - our death and then our eternal condition is forever fixed. It is better the turmoil and change of life now in conversion than 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; nor base our way forward on tradition alone - as good a tradition as it may be, for we must be constantly seeking God's leading through His word, to see how the Lord would have us move on as individuals or a church. The Lord may have good surprises ahead for us.

Perhaps someone watching or listening knows they have been playing at Christianity - yes born-again, but running from God either openly or secretly. Maybe God has been challenging them to move on and to come back to and to go onward with Him. God can 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 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 the 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. As hard as it was going to be, what lay ahead was a joyful prospect - to see and be with Joseph. We can only imagine the joy and excitement that must have been in Jacob's heart at this thought. Also, he was 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, as 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. 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 - for the young people those choices are multiplied in many areas – courses, places of study, boy/girl friend etc. 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 Hebron where he settled in chapter 35, but he goes via Beersheba. Why did he stop here and make sacrifices? It was here 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 God for His mercy, for 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 the family cared for. Yet it appeared he was uncertain if 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 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 look upward to learn of God and His will and way for us as we daily go in His way revealed to us by His word. The Lord does guide, direct and lead His people. 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 Canaan was his country (32:9) and he may 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** 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 - Joseph would put his hand upon his eyes - meaning Joseph would be with him when he died. God was very kind to Jacob and assured him 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.

Armed with this threefold assurance of God's promises, Jacob set 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, which is given once and for all the moment we believe, but to help us keep a right perspective on life and confusing 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 for our life, He will lead and guide us one step at a time - from A to B or even A to S! 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 blessing - 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 the hymn *"How firm a foundation"* 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.'*

We are to see our loving Lord and Saviour is with us, 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 life, in middle age and even in old age - Jacob was still being lovingly shaped when 130 years old! That 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 may have been bitter, hurt, self-pitying, 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 and why hadn't God stopped it?

How like us he was! He was a real human believer, not a superman, 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 again 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 and say with Philip Doddridge: *“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 blessed 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 about moving on with God. I'm not saying change is always necessary, but if God was clearly leading us on in our lives, dare we resist? For those who are not Christians - 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. Remember Lot's wife and not look back as we plough the furrow of our life.

Yet as we do God's will, it will be our pleasure. Jacob had 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 and joy set before us. May we press onwards to serve and obey our great God and Saviour wherever He may lead us.