



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Genesis 47: 1-34

“The Grandeur of God's Glory”

TRANSCRIPT

Turn with me to chapter 47 of the Book of Genesis in your Bibles and you follow along with me as I read this important chapter. Now the children of Israel with Jacob have now come into the land of Egypt. Joseph is the prime minister. The Pharaoh who is ruling at the present time is a good one, friendly, not only to Joseph, but also to the members of the family of Joseph, and we read now of the presentation of Joseph's brothers and of Jacob to the Pharaoh and also in the last part of the chapter of the approaching death of the patriarch Jacob. Verse 1 begins,

“Then Joseph went in and told Pharaoh and said, ‘My father and my brothers and their flocks and their herds and all that they have, have come out of the land of Canaan and behold they are in the land of Goshen.’ And he took five men from among his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh. Then Pharaoh said to his brothers, ‘What is your occupation?’ (That is exactly what Joseph had warned them that the Pharaoh would say to them, and he had warned them to be honest in their reply. Shepherds are abominations to the Egyptians, Moses has told us, but they were told to say the truth.) So they said to Pharaoh, ‘Your servants are shepherds, both we and our fathers.’ And they said to Pharaoh, we have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servant's flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now therefore, please let your servants live in the land of Goshen.

“Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is at your disposal. Settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land. Let them live in the land of Goshen. And if you know any capable men among them, then put them in charge of my livestock. Then Joseph brought his father, Jacob, and presented him to Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. (Notice the order, it is not Pharaoh blessed Jacob, Jacob blessed Pharaoh.)

‘And Pharaoh said to Jacob, ‘How many years have you lived?’ Evidently, it was obvious that Jacob was a very elderly man. It is even possible as some have suggested that perhaps among the heathen or pagans, men did not live to the age of Jacob at this time, and it was somewhat unusual for Pharaoh to look upon a man of the years of Jacob. So Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The years of my sojourning are 130. Few and unpleasant have been the years of my life nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning.’

In the original text here, there is a great deal of garrulousness expressed in the sense that Jacob’s words are much lengthier than the translation that I have just read. For example, he says not the years of my sojourning, but the days of the years of my sojourning. It is characteristic of people who are older to be garrulous, not always true, but nevertheless it is characteristic of them. One old person’s prayer that I remember that I have on my desk, but since my desk is in storage, I cannot remember it exactly. It is something like, “Oh Lord, give me wings to get to the point,” which is suitable for almost all old people such as I am. And for some young people too, who find it difficult to get to the point. Well Jacob is garrulous, but yet a very winning character in spite of it. The tenth verse says again and Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from his presence.

Now the next verses describe the economic policy of Joseph and it may appear at first that Joseph is a very severe prime minister because when he gets through, everything belongs to Pharaoh. But that is just about what is happening in this country too, and as a matter of fact when he says that Pharaoh is to have the fifth, frequently he gets more than that. So we should look at this in the light of other places as well.

“So Joseph settled his father and brothers and gave them possession in the land of Egypt, and the best of the land, and the land of Rameses as Pharaoh had ordered. Joseph provided his father and brothers and all his father’s household with food according to their little ones.

Now, there was no food in the land because the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. Joseph gathered all the money that was found in the land of Canaan, in Egypt and in the land of Canaan for the grain, which they bought and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh’s house. When the money was all spent in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, ‘Give us food for why should we die in your presence? For our money is gone.’ Then Joseph said, ‘Give up your livestock and I would give you food for your livestock, since your money is gone.’ So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, and the flocks, and the herds, and the donkeys, and he fed them with food in exchange for all their livestock that year.

“And when that year was ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, ‘We will not hide from our lord that our money is all spent and the cattle are my lord’s. There is nothing left for my lord, except our bodies and our lands.’ (And incidentally to take the cattle is not nearly so bad as it might seem since if you did not have money to buy food for the cattle, then cattle are a burden as well. But they continue.) ‘Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land. Buy us and our land for food, and we and our land will be slaves to Pharaoh, so give us seed that we may live and not die and that the land may not be desolate.’

“So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. For every Egyptian sold his field because the famine was severe upon them. Thus the land became Pharaoh’s. And as for the people he removed them to the cities from one end of Egypt’s border to the other, (that evidently was for purposes of distributing the food more easily and perhaps more economically). Only the land of the priests he did not buy.”

Now that is very interesting because in the later history of the children of Israel, there will be the confrontation at the time of the Exodus between the gods of Egypt and the god of Jacob’s descendants. And so evidently in the providence of God, it was arranged by the Lord God that the land of the priests was not to be bought, but rather they were to have their land in order that there might be a great confrontation later and in that confrontation God would demonstrate his own superiority at the expense of the gods of the priests or the gods of Egypt.

“Only the lands of the priests he did not buy for the priests had an allotment from Pharaoh and they lived off the allotment, which Pharaoh gave them. Therefore, they did not sell their land.

“Then Joseph said to the people, ‘Behold, I have today bought you and your land for Pharaoh. Now here is seed for you and you may sow the land and at the harvest, you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh and four-fifths shall be your own for seed of the field and for your food and for those of your households and as food for your little ones.’ So they said, ‘You have saved our lives. Let us find favor in the sight of my lord and we will be Pharaoh’s slaves.’ (So evidently they did not think that Joseph had been as severe as some modern commentators would like for him to be seen as, severe and harsh.) Joseph made out a statute concerning the land of Egypt valid to this day that Pharaoh should have the fifth. Only the land of the priests did not become Pharaoh’s.

“Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt and Goshen and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous. And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the length of Jacob’s life was one hundred and forty seven years. “When the time for Israel to die drew near, (the Authorized Version has something like, ‘When the time that Jacob must die drew near,’ a little stronger stress upon the necessity of his death. It is something you know that we all must do, we must die. It is interesting to see how a believer dies as over against the unbelievers.) When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called for his son Joseph and said to him, ‘Please if I have found favor in your sight, place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. Please do not bury me in Egypt, but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall

carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place.’ And he said, ‘I will do as you have said.’ And he said, ‘Swear to me.’ So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed and worshiped at the head of the bed.”

The Greek translation of the Old Testament has at the end of that verse, “Then Israel worshiped upon the top of his staff.’ So it is a little bit different from the reading that you have here and the difference is just a slight difference in the original text, the difference between the word *mattab* and the word *mittab*. One means rod and one means bed, and the New Testament in the Epistle of the Hebrews has followed the Greek translation and we read there and Jacob worshiped upon the top of his staff. That may be the correct reading. The Old Testament Hebrew text that we have is not always accurate and so that may be the original reading. The point of either reading is the same and that is that Jacob bows in worship, and that is characteristic of the death of the believer.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

In one of the earlier messages, Jacob’s name is changed from Jacob, or rather in one of the earlier messages I made mention of the fact that Jacob’s name is changed from Jacob to Israel, and commented upon the fact that some have thought that Jacob’s name meant prince of God and others that it meant God’s warrior or God’s fighter. Well the subject for this morning is “The Grandeur of God’s Warrior,” and it is a reference of course to the name Israel, which begins to appear more frequently now in the latter parts of The Book of Genesis for Jacob.

It is as one reads these chapters, clearly the end of Jacob’s life of faith. Isn’t it interesting that he calls it a sojourning, just as we have been singing about the pilgrim existence of a Christian? The Authorized Version uses the term pilgrimage; that is, life for Jacob is a journey. It has a starting point and it has a goal and as is generally the case of pilgrimage has a sacred significance, so that the idea of life that Jacob had is a life of sacred significance. As a matter of fact everything in a believer’s life is sacred, except sin. And so consequently the whole of life for Jacob is one great pilgrimage from the starting point to its ultimate goal.

The New Testament as you know makes a great deal of this. In the Epistle to the Hebrews in the eleventh chapter, the chapter of those faithful men, the writer there comments upon the Christian life as a life in which we are strangers and exiles on the earth. All these died in faith; he says, without receiving the promises but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles in the earth. And in the thirteenth chapter in a very vivid statement, at least it is vivid to me, he says for here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come. So the idea of the Christian life that is suggested by Jacob and the use of the term pilgrimage or sojourning is this idea of life with sacred significance which has a certain definite starting point and a certain definite goal.

That is not a very prominent idea today. We do not like to think unfortunately of the Christian life as being a pilgrimage. Perhaps it is because there had been so many who sneered like George Elliot at the Christian idea of life as a pilgrimage by saying of it, that it was “other-worldliness.” In the 20th Century, we like to say that we are speaking about things that are facts. We want to tell the truth as it is so-called. And the idea of a person living an other-worldly kind of existence is not a very attractive thing for us. But nevertheless that is the way the Bible presents the Christian life. It is a pilgrimage and we are strangers on the earth and we are pilgrims, and if we are to live it to the full and enjoy it to the full then we ought to assume the relationship to the Lord that is suggested by the term pilgrim.

Luther said that a theologian was made by *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio*. That is the theologian was made by prayer, by meditation, and by afflictions and sufferings. And that characterizes the life of Jacob, this pilgrim, because there were occasions in which he wrestled with the Lord God in prayer. There were occasions no doubt as the shepherd that he meditated upon the promises that were given because he knew those promises and relied upon them, and you can see it expressed in his desire to be buried not in the land of Egypt but back with his fathers in the land of Canaan. And certainly he had his afflictions. He spoke of his days as being few and evil or short and sad. So what

we have here is a picture of the life of faith as a pilgrimage, but we also have I think a very beautiful picture of the death of faith or the death in faith because we are not speaking of faith dying.

There comes a time when Jacob must die, the Scriptures say. In fact, one of the commentators has suggested that Jacob is a model of old age in its sunset time because he has faith, he looks upward. He has gratitude, he looks backward. He looks forward in hope and he looks outward in love. And the other lessons that appear are lessons such as the splendor of honest toil. It is all right to be a shepherd even if the Egyptians consider that occupation an abomination. There is the sacredness of family life and you see it in the relationship of Joseph and his brothers and their relationship to their father, Jacob. Blood is thicker than water we say. You can even see some intimations of that here, but I think that in some sense the supreme thought of this passage is the work of the saint of God as over against the greatest that this earth can offer.

When Jacob comes into the presence of Pharaoh and mind you he was the greatest monarch of Jacob’s day. It was as if one of us should enter into the presence of the leading ruler on the face of this earth, and it is God’s saint who blesses the ruler and not vice versa. It is not the ruler who blesses the saint, it is the saint who blesses the ruler, and just to make the point, Moses mentions it twice. He says, ‘Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Jacob blessed Pharaoh.’ So far as saints are concerned, they are higher than any king upon the face of the earth who is not a saint. Now kings are called ministers of God, but the simplest believer in the Lord Jesus Christ stands before the Lord God on higher ground than presidents and kings and czars and Caesars and others.

Now the open verses of this particular chapter give us a picture of Jacob and his sons before Pharaoh; first his sons and then Jacob, and so in the westerning sunlight of his earthly pilgrimage Jacob appears before the leading monarch of his day as a very beautiful character. He is old, a hundred and thirty years, and then at this time was old. Now the Bible says that to be old has some things in its favor. For example, the text of Scripture says, a hoary head or a gray head is a crown of glory. It is found in the way of righteousness.

Now the Authorized Version says, if it is found in the way of righteousness and I think that is really the sense of it, but here is an old man and he comes into the presence of the greatest monarch of his day. Incidentally in the instructions that Joseph gives to his brothers, he says, when Pharaoh asks you what your occupation is, do not beat around the bush. Even though shepherds are an abomination, tell him exactly what you are doing, and that I think is a model of the way in which we as Christians ought to deal with the secular power, and we have to deal with the secular power every day. We should deal with the secular power in honesty.

Now pilgrim people should deal with honesty before the secular power and we will discover that honesty pays. Isn’t it interesting that the citizens of Egypt lost their money, they lost their cattle, they lost their land, and all the time the children of Israel are over in the land of Goshen and they do not lose their money, they do not lose their land, they do not lose their livestock and cattle; as a matter of fact, they become more and more fruitful while the citizens of Egypt become servants of the Pharaoh. That is God’s way of taking care of his people. Worship God, honor the king; honesty does pay off.

When Joseph first brings five of the brothers in before Pharaoh and why he does that I do not know. Why just five? Perhaps he considered that a kind of a round number. But anyway, at any rate, they appeared before Pharaoh, and he asks the inevitable question, what is your occupation? Joseph said, he is going to ask you that, and so he asks it, what is your occupation? And they say, your servants are shepherds. Not only that our fathers were shepherds too and we have come to sojourn in the land, perhaps little realizing that they were unconsciously fulfilling the prophecy that had been given to Abraham back in the fifteenth chapter of The Book of Genesis when the Abrahamic covenant was confirmed, and so as a result of their honesty and as a result of appearing before Pharaoh, they are given that choice, fertile place in the land of Egypt, the land of Goshen where they prospered through the years.

Then Jacob comes before Pharaoh, and this is a striking picture because the feeble patriarch, the elderly man stands before the mighty monarch and in the seventh verse as the account continues

we read and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Now we are not to think of that as being simply a desire that the Pharaoh would have good health. It is not like saying, may the king live forever or old king live forever, but being conscious of the dignity of being Yahweh’s prophet, Yahweh’s servant, he bestows heavenly blessing upon the Pharaoh. So the prince of God, Israel, appears before the prince of Egypt and it is the prince of God who blesses the prince of Egypt.

Now in the New Testament, there is an interesting verse in the seventh chapter of the epistle of the Hebrews which confirms all that I am speaking about here because it says there without contradiction the lesser is blessed of the greater’ And I put actually a phrase there that has to do with another section there, but the text says the lesser is blessed of the greater. The reference is to the meeting of Melchizedek and Abraham and Melchizedek blessing Abraham. A testimony to the greatness of Melchizedek who is the priest forever, or the type of the Priest forever and Abraham, and so if the less is blessed of the greater, then when Jacob blesses Pharaoh, it is clear that in the sight of God as well as in the sight of Moses, it is Jacob who is the superior character and he stands superior to the greatest king of his day.

In the New Testament we read, the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, and in the expression of this blessing that was prayer, and no doubt Pharaoh had never heard anyone pray like Jacob prayed in his presence. One commentator even suggests that it is possible in the hall in which Jacob appeared before Pharaoh there had never been uttered a prayer in the name of the Lord Jehovah there. Well, that is true or not of course we do not know, but we do know that when Jacob blesses Pharaoh it is the true God through his prophet laying a blessing upon the greatest monarch of the day.

Well, Pharaoh asks what must have been inevitable question again because when he looked at Jacob and saw his age, he said, how many years have you lived? It is possible that old age was a rarity among the pagan Egyptians. We do know that it is healthier to be a Christian. It is. It is healthier. God does give the blessing, generally speaking, of longer life. I know I used to in the earlier days when I was speaking in beginning new churches it was amazing how few funerals we had

in those churches and I used to comment on it occasionally that it was healthy to be a member of this particular congregation.

It is rather interesting, but nevertheless that was my experience. I am sure that that has no scientific value. There were no statistics taken, but I used to reflect upon the fact that I had very few funerals to conduct, and I thought that it was probably because of the fact that at least an attempt was made to preach the word of God. I think it is healthy to be here in the congregation of Believers Chapel as a general rule, but finally of course the king of terrors catches up with all of us, and when Pharaoh asked Jacob, how many years have you lived, he is looking at an old man, an old man who is facing death.

That is an interesting question incidentally because a person may be very old and actually may have lived very little. It is possible to be 90 years of age and to have lived only a few days. It is possible to be 20 and die and to have lived a long life spiritually. You see it is not so much how long you live, it is the kind of life that you live. And it is very important at the important stages of life that you make the proper decisions. How old are you? Seventeen, oh what a critical age seventeen is because it is the time when decisions are made that often affect your life from that time on. Twenty-one, twenty-one is when we reach our maturity, so we used to think and then we could be independent, but a man who is independent and not depended upon the Lord God is not going to live much of a life. Thirty, life is beginning to flee.

Some men by the age of thirty have already given tremendous testimony to the grace of God, like Robert Murray McCheyne, who died before he reached the age of thirty, but whose life has been a life relevant with the sweet savor of Jesus Christ down through the years since his death. Forty, it is amazing that when you reach the age of forty and you are on the other side, thirty-five is a middle age remember, when you reach the age of forty, forty, then statistically, so far as Christians can tell, there are many fewer people who become Christians after the age of forty. If you reach the age of forty and you have never been brought to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, the chances of your becoming a Christian after that time becomes slimmer and slimmer statistically.

Now we know that ultimately it is the work of the Holy Spirit and he may sovereignly break up that hard-hearted forty-year-old individual as easily as he does the tender hearted six-or eight-year-old child, but nevertheless statistically it does seem that if we pass on and resist the appeals of the Holy Spirit we become hardened, more and more hardened until ultimately fewer come to know of the Lord Jesus Christ. So how many years have you lived or have you really lived. You may be fifty years of age and not know Jesus Christ as your savior, you have not really lived. You may be ten or fifteen and you already know him, you have begun to live. May god help you to live a full and good life.

Now Jacob’s answer to the question is interesting, like a garrulous old man, I sat down at breakfast at 8:30, message with an old man not as old as I am and he could not get off of his mind that old people were garrulous. Several times he said, are you sure about that? [Laughter] He garrulously questioned the garrulousness of old men, but Jacob speaks like that. Notice how his words are actually lengthened expressions. He does not know that prayer, “Oh God, give me wings to get to the true.” He does not say that years of my sojourning as the New American Standard Bible translated, but the days of the years of my sojourning are a hundred and thirty. Few and unpleasant have been days of the years of my life; nor have I attained until the days of the years that my fathers have lived in the days of their sojourning. So just like old people he drags it out a little bit. One of the commentators said that Jacob is sovereign old age personified, unimpressed by the rank of Pharaoh, he speaks the truth. He is diffuse. He is deliberate. He takes an independent view of events. He does not listen to what other people say. He has had enough experience now to know that his views are more important than what others think experiences ought to be, and furthermore he makes these somber comparisons with the past; few and evil have my days been and they are not nearly as great as the days of Abraham and the days of Isaac. Those were the good old days. So it is a kind of masterly little portrait of an aged man.

Now then when he says that they are few and evil in a sense he is speaking the absolute truth because that is what they were for him. They were few and evil. Just think of the days of Jacob. He

began his life with difficulty. He had the difficulty with Laban and after having been forced to flee because of his troubles with Esau he had to deal with Laban, then of course he had the encounter with the angel wrestler and that might have seen to be a great encounter from one standpoint because he had an encounter with the Lord God and he came to see God but at the same time his hip joint was touched and he limped for the rest of his life as a result of that. And then in addition, there was the death of Deborah at Luz and finally Ephrath when Rachel, his beloved Rachel, tender-eyed Rachel was lost to him. A little further on he came to Mamre and there his father Isaac had died.

And then of course he had family difficulties with Simeon and Levi, who in the destruction of a city brought disgrace and reproach upon the children of Israel and then there was Judah who in his sensuousness dragged the name of Israel into the mud in the incident with Tamar, and then all of this time he thought that he had lost his favorite son, the first son of Rachel, Joseph, and now he must linger for seventeen years in the land of Egypt and there die outside of the Promised Land.

One might have thought that Jacob’s life, if you do not look at these things, was the life of the blessing of the Lord God and then one thinks it was because he would later say that he has fed me all the days of my life. But looked at it from another standpoint, it is true to say that few have trodden the path more paved with jagged flints or bound around their brows a crown more full of thorns than Jacob. One of the commentators has put it that way. You might have called his life a failure. You might have said Esau was the one who had the blessing from the Lord God because Esau was a very prominent and successful man. He was a man who succeeded also by the Dukes of Edom. If you had asked for wealth and royalty as the sign of success in life, well then it would have been Esau and not Jacob.

I just returned from England and visiting a number of the castles again or palaces, and one gains the impression from entering these, I think I have now been in 423 castles or palaces in my life, one gains the impression that the only persons who lived were the earls and the dukes and the others, but actually it was just the opposite. It was Jacob who was blessed and it was Esau who was not.

And one knows immediately that if Esau had come into the presence of Pharaoh, we would never have read Esau blessed Pharaoh. It is Jacob who blesses Pharaoh.

His life was short. He was absolutely accurate. If one compares it with his forefathers, Abraham lived to be 175 years of age and Isaac lived to be 180 years. So his was short and sad. He is not afraid to witness in front of the powers that be, too. So one must admire Jacob in spite of the many failures of the man, the Holy Spirit has worked and now we see Israel truly developing into a character in harmony with his name.

Now the next section of this particular chapter, I just want to make a comment or two on, it is kind of a summary of Joseph’s life in one sense that Joseph is a man who was as it is put in Romans chapter 12 and verse 11, “He was a man who was not lacking in diligence. He was fervent in spirit. He was serving the Lord,” or as the Americans say, so one commentator has put it, he was a man who had grace, who had grit, and who had gumption. He was active and he served and towards the Israelites his policy was to give them corn, to give them home, to give them property rights. That was in the providence of God. Toward the Egyptians, well as a result of his policies the citizens in Egypt became crowned tenants of Pharaoh. They entered into feudal service. And we must not think that this was necessarily bad.

Some of the commentators have thought this was very severe to reduce them to feudal service, but the people did not think that. They say, according to the twenty-fifth verse, you have saved our lives. Let us find favor in the sight of my lord and we will be Pharaoh’s slaves. So it was not cruel so far as they were concerned. They regarded this as a blessing that he had been so careful of their resources that they worth their lives were saved.

Now isn’t it also interesting? We have commented on the fact that Joseph is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ; that is, he was the person who suffered, and then he was exalted, and then he was the means of the salvation of his people, and so the Lord Jesus Christ was in the suffering of the cross at Calvary. He has been exalted to the right hand of the throne of God, and he is the Savior of his people, and he will yet be the Savior of the Nation Israel in the future.

But what a difference between Joseph and our Lord in the ultimate sense for the Egyptians and others, and incidentally Joseph’s name in Egyptian means according to some, “savior of the world.” In the case of Joseph he saved his people by virtue of his wisdom and sinuosity, but the Lord Jesus Christ saves his people by virtue of the shedding of the precious blood. But I love that expression on the twenty fifth verse, “You have saved our lives. Let us find favor in the sight of my lord and we will be Pharaoh’s slaves,” and you can turn that around and say as a prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ, “You have saved my life. Let me find favor in your sight and let me be your slave forever.”

Do you know the experience of salvation? Do you know the experience of being lost and saved by the Lord Jesus? If you do, you probably want to serve him in that sense.

Now coming to the last part of this particular chapter, let me make a few comments concerning Jacob’s residence and death in Egypt. Joseph is called three times to Jacob’s death bed. Great detail is given. Have you noticed this in the Bible that in the lives of Abraham or Isaac or David or any of the other great characters, what usually happens in the Scripture is a rather lengthy section is devoted to the details of their lives and then when they die, just a sentence. Sometimes only a clause or a phrase, but in the case of Jacob, we have three accounts in which his death is stressed or the nearness of his death, and the fullness of detail that is given is the testimony to the importance of these words concerning Jacob’s death.

It is almost as if he wants us to realize that here is an illustration of how a believer ought to die. What a difference it is when a believer dies too. If you have been at the bedside of a believer as over against the bedside of an unbeliever, you will notice immediately the difference between the death of a believer and the death of an unbeliever.

Now Jacob, we are told lived in the land of Egypt as an old age pensioner as the British would say, for seventeen years, so that his whole life was 147 years: 77 years in Canaan, 20 years in Padan-aram, 33 years back in Canaan, now 17 years in Egypt; 147 years, but at the end of his life there is light in the even tide.

Now in his death itself when the time came for Israel to die, he called his son Joseph and he said to him, “Now don’t bury me in the land of Egypt.” After all you are not surprised that Jacob dies this way. The man who has fought with God and prevailed that to now is surely a man who is not going to be dismayed by engaging the king of terrors, death itself. So he says, “Don’t bury me in Egypt.”

You might have said looking at this why it was just a natural desire. A man does want to be buried very often at the place where he began his life and so it might be just the natural desire, one might think.

I was at Blenheim Palace just a few days ago where Mr. Churchill was born. If anybody deserved to be buried at Westminster Abbey, it seems to me it was Winston Churchill, but he is buried in the little chapel funeral grounds near there. He wanted to be evidently buried back there where he began his existence. So one might say, “Do not bury me in Egypt,” means simply that he wants to be buried back at home, but his wish has a high origin in that. He is thinking about the promises of God. He is thinking about the symbolism of the fact that Canaan belongs to him and to his seed, and he knows that Egypt is not his ultimate place of enjoyment. It is not the place promised to him and so when he says, please do not bury me in Egypt. He exacts this promise from Joseph because he dies in faith in the promises of God that one of these days Canaan shall be Abraham’s, and Isaac’s, and Jacob’s and their seed, and of course that is exactly what the Scriptures go on to say.

In the twentieth verse, he says, when I lie down with my fathers; now he is not talking about the burial when he says that, he is talking about the fellowship that he has with them. He says when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place. He knows though he does not understand as much about this as we do now, because the Lord Jesus has brought death and immortality to life by means of his death and resurrection. We now know more about the life that is beyond us than they knew. But he senses that for him to die is to enter into the presence of the faithful who have themselves served the Lord God. And so he says when I lie down

with my fathers, there is going to be an ancestral reunion and that is symbolized by the burial, not created by the burial.

The chapter concludes with his extracting from Joseph an oath that he would do it and then Israel bowed and worshiped on the top of his staff or at the head of his bed. Now that is striking to me too because what was it that Jacob has been talking about in the preceding chapters? Well, when Joseph leaves him nothing is said particularly other than the fact that he was very much upset over it, but when the time came for his brothers to come and say if we are going back down to Egypt we must bring Benjamin. Jacob says, “Oh if you take Benjamin I am not sure I will ever see him again. You will bring down my gray hairs to the grave in sorrow.” He says it more than once.

And then when Judah makes that eloquent appeal to Joseph, he says that that is what our father said. We will bring down his gray hairs in sorrow to the grave all the time. The Lord was smiling in heaven because he knew that Jacob was not going to have his gray hairs brought down in sorrow to the grave. As a matter of fact this lost son about whom he is so upset, Joseph, will be the comforter of Jacob at his end. A lovely sunset for Jacob’s life after a day of storms and tempests and clouds -- that is the way the Lord God deals with his saints.

Such a great thing to be a saint of God. Such a great thing to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ while the life of faith then is a pilgrimage. It has a goal. What is our striving? If you have a goal, you usually strive for it, do you not? To what or for what are you striving? What is your goal in life? Is it to be a success in business you mean? Is that the preeminent goal of your life? If you are in real estate, is it to be the best real estate man? Is that the preeminent goal? We know it is important to be a good real estate man if you are in the real estate business or a good banker if you are a banker or a good lawyer if you are a lawyer, but is that your preeminent goal in life?

If life is a pilgrimage for a believer with a starting point and a goal that goal ought to be a spiritual goal. Three things someone has said made Jacob a royal character. It was prayer, it was suffering, and it was contact with the Lord Yahweh and the result is that in the final years of Jacob’s

life; this man who has suffered so much, who has had such great experiences, whose days are few and evil, it is this man who appears before the leading authority of the day.

I was reminded as I studied this chapter again; do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings. He will not stand before obscured man, and it surely is a striking fact that this weather beaten traveler, this shepherd, this man who spent great months and years out in the fields with his sheep, now stands before the greatest monarch of his day, honored by God, and honored by the world as well. And the death of the faithful, his entrance into fellowship with the fathers, his entrance into the fellowship of the elect, and above all his entrance into the fellowship of the Lord God himself.

If there ever was an individual who had no pause in his life as he passed from this existence into the next, it is Jacob and it is the experience of all who are saints. Because for death for the believer is the passage into the presence of the Lord God. Hundreds of years later, the Lord Jesus speaks about the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.

Now I will say just one final word to you. It is possible that you are in this auditorium and you are not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot speak about the life of faith. You cannot do anything more than fear of the coming of death because you cannot die in faith. In order to live the life of faith and in order to die in faith, one must have faith and that faith is communicated by the Holy Spirit and through his efficacious work we come to see ourselves as lost men and the atoning work of Christ as that which meets our needs and it is by the work of the Holy Spirit that we are led to flee for the refuge that is found in Jesus Christ.

If you are here and you do not know him, you do not have any hope for the future other than to appear in the presence of the Lord God for judgment and so we call upon you to hear the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and Thou shall be saved. Salvation is a free gift. It is not anything that you earn by your good works, by your prayers, by your religious activities, by even the observance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, by

your good resolutions, by your education, by any of your strivings and fightings and skimmings; it is a gift of God.

It is not even obtained when we give our hearts to Christ. Giving of our hearts to Christ is something that is the fruit of salvation. One is saved by believing in him, by trusting in him, by clinging to the merits of the savior, we offer that atoning sacrifice sufficient for our sins. If you are here and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus, you are lost then. May God the Holy Spirit bring you to trust in him.

Casting away all trust in anything else and clinging only to Christ, you receive as a free gift the forgiveness of sins. Sometimes it seems that even in the preaching of the gospel, we are not so clear on the fact that our salvation is of grace, and so we talk about our giving in order to be saved. Salvation is the receiving of something from the Lord God as a gift. Even in our teaching of our Sunday school children we often err, we tell our Sunday school children, love Jesus Christ, but that is not the way of salvation. That is the fruit of salvation. To be saved, one must trust in Christ. To love him is the product of the trust or faith given by God the Holy Spirit as the gospel is preached.

And so I appeal to you if you are in this audience and you have never been saved, we remind you of the atoning work of Christ. He shed blood for the forgiveness of sins and that salvation is available for you. May God so work that you come to faith in him. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee Lord for these wonderful portraits of the life of faith and death in faith, and we pray, O God, that if there are some in this audience who do not know faith in Christ as their own personal experience that through the Holy Spirit they may be brought to repentance in faith and given the life that is life indeed. Of those of us who do know him, O God, enable us to live in faith and enable us as we approach our death for no one knows the day of his death but we die in faith and now we ask that grace, mercy, and peace may go with us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.