

Perhaps you are like me... and have certain Christian authors that always seem to write material that resonates with you. For me... one of those is Pastor/author Tim Keller. I want to share with you a short piece that I read the other day:

Some years ago, I had a relative who never would wear a seat belt. Every time I talked to him, he would get in the car, but wouldn't wear his seat belt. We all nagged him to no avail. Then one day he got in the car and put his seat belt on right away. We said, "What happened to you?" He said, "A couple weeks ago, I went to see a friend of mine in the hospital. He was in a car crash, and he went through the windshield. He had like 200 stitches in his face. For some strange reason, ever since then, I've been having no problem buckling up."

I asked him, "Well, did you get new information? What changed you? Did you not know that people go through the windshield?" Of course I knew the answer to those questions: What happened was that an abstract proposition became connected to an actual sensory experience that is something he saw. As Jonathan Edwards used to basically say over and over again, it's only when you attach to some truth—that's when real life change occurs. Something has to become real to your heart. Then you will be changed.

When it comes to Spiritual truth... for many believers... so much remains merely "abstract proposition" ... until it becomes connected to an actual sensory experience. ... For a great many of us... there was that time in our lives when we came in contact with the gospel (the Word of God) and we turned to Him. ... But sometime afterward... there was that period of struggle when we thought we could live our lives in our own strength. A lot Bible truth became more like "abstract proposition" (we knew it to be true... but it just didn't excite us very much or motivate us to significant life-change. Perhaps that lasted for years. Then there came the time when we

did grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and began to walk by faith.

Perhaps you are still in that second phase right now. So much of God's truth has not come alive yet. ... God's truth is not bringing about the consistent change that you know God wants for your life. My prayer is that today's passage in Genesis will give you hope. ... You see... if God can quicken the soul of Jacob... He can enliven your own.

What we see in Genesis 47... is the best chapter in the life of Jacob so far. Jacob did not appear in a good light when we first meet him in Scripture. In fact... not until he makes *this trip* to Egypt... do we begin to appreciate how he has become a man of faith. This chapter... more than any other... reveals a strong faith.

(I have to agree with J. Vernon McGee who says): "*The life of Jacob can be divided into three stages that are based on his geographical locations: the land of Haran... the land of Canaan... and (now) the land of Egypt.*" ... Here in Genesis... these are not only **geographical** areas... but they characterize Jacob's three **spiritual** levels.

Jacob set-out for his Uncle Laban's (in Haran) with just a staff. ... When he came into Haran... he was God's man living in the flesh... relying on deception. He lived by his own wits. ... And he came out of Haran... running. ... He was running away from his father-in-law and was afraid to meet his own brother Esau. ... Then in the land of Canaan... Jacob had his wrestling match with the Lord. Jacob fought in his own strength... which characterized his time back in Canaan. (It was full of struggle.) ... Now he has been brought to Egypt in special carts that Pharaoh sent. ... He is not

walking in his own strength... and he is not running away anymore. In this phase of his life we will see him definitely walking by faith. Jacob has become the man that God wanted him to be... and only God can make this kind of man.

Jacob's life in Haran typifies the believer today... who is living with God's truth as "abstract proposition." Jacob's life in the land of Canaan typifies the believer who is fighting in his/her own strength. ... But (now) Jacob's life in Egypt typifies the believer who is walking by faith. ... So... today we are going to observe what only God could accomplish in a life like Jacob.

We are also going to see in Genesis 47 something that evokes strong allusions... to an event (that I believe is in our not-too-distant future)... It is how God will sovereignly deal with man's natural tendency to rebellion and independence. ... Our passage anticipates the day when the Lord Jesus will set up His Kingdom on earth and rule over all the world. ... It gives a prophetic glimpse of the Lord's coming (how He will deal with the Jewish people... and – in contrast - how He will deal with all other nations.) In a coming day... the Lord is going to bring the entire world directly under His control... and it will have so many touch points... to the events recorded in our Genesis passage.

Come alive! My friend. Don't let this be merely abstract proposition!

... .. Christ is coming – soon! ... [P A U S E]

We begin by looking at the kind of man - that only God can make – of you and me. We see it in Jacob's third (and final) life-phase... down in Egypt.

Genesis 47:1-6

Since Joseph and Pharaoh had already agreed to settle his family in Goshen... the brothers' appearance at court was a formality... but an important one. ... And just as Joseph predicted... Pharaoh inquired about their occupation... to which they "spontaneously" *chorused*... "*Your servants are shepherds, as our fathers were...*"

The brothers answered Pharaoh in a spirit of respect and humility... calling themselves the servants of Pharaoh. ... But notice how they also seemed to stand upright in Pharaoh's presence. They were answering—Pharaoh himself—with a character of tremendous boldness (knowing that Pharaoh and all Egyptians had a revulsion for shepherds) : *We are shepherds and our family has been shepherds down through the centuries since our forefathers.*

Happily their self-assurance raised no royal indignation. But (likely) Joseph had held his breath. ... *Whew!* ... Joseph's strategy could not have gone better. Pharaoh's response went far beyond expectations.

Pharaoh kept his promises and gave them the best of the land for their families and their flocks and herds... and he requested that they care for his herds as well. (Shepherds may be an abomination to Egyptians... but animals are needed for food and clothes... and so Pharaoh seeks out from Joseph's brothers experienced and skilled shepherds... to take care of his own flock.) ... This was quite a promotion for the eleven sons of Jacob. One day they were ordinary resident aliens... and the next day they were Pharaoh's official herdsmen!

This blessing from Pharaoh added work to the family of Jacob. (Their work load increased.)

Isn't it funny (?) But today this might not be seen as a blessing. We tend to see work as a curse!

It is quite common for us (as believers) to pray for the blessing of God. But do we ever recognize that we are (in all likelihood) asking God to increase our work load...? ... It might be interesting to see what would happen to a body of believers who prayed '*Lord, give us more work to do.*' (Once we are able to have public church services... I invite you to join us on the first Thursday of every month at 7:00p.m. – That is what we pray for.)

Come alive! My friend. Don't let this be merely abstract proposition!

... In an age that is prone to think of blessing as a decrease in work... it would be fitting to ask the Lord to teach us afresh the blessing in asking for an increased work load. [P A U S E]

Next we come to the verses where we see the spiritual character of Jacob... in Egypt. (He has really come a long way!)

Genesis 47:7

Here was the greatest king upon earth... meeting a man who appeared to be only an ordinary man... (only a simple... elderly man.) ... We can picture the gnarled... weather-beaten... old shepherd... whose hard life on the hills had etched its lines on his face. ... We can picture him dressed in the best raiment Joseph could find for him... and wearing it as uncomfortably as one who has never had to before.

And so... in comes old Jacob... all out of place... it would seem... amid the flaunted finery of the court.

We see Jacob walking slowly (laboring with every step) down the long line of flawless guards... nobles... and officials... He is hobbling because of his defective thigh... and leaning heavily on his staff. ... We see him making his way up to Pharaoh's throne and there... to the astonishment of all the court... he raised himself **erect** - instead of falling prostrate on his face. ... Then we see him raise his sunburned hand in blessing.

The Hebrew word *blessed* (veyeb har eh-kah)... is far stronger than the word “*greeted*” or “*paid his respects*”. ... It means “to greet a person by asking God to richly bless them.” ... The same kind of blessing took place when Melchizekek blessed the victorious Abraham (back in Genesis 14). ... And Hebrews 7:7 makes the point that the “lesser” is always blessed by the “*superior*.” ... So (in order for Jacob to do this... Jacob had to see himself as a greater person than Pharaoh... in God's eyes.

For Jacob to bless Pharaoh... Jacob was saying, “*You, my lord, may be a prince among men and have power on earth... But I am a prince with God and have power in heaven.*”

In the eyes of God... and in the pages of *future history*... this “*simple* man” was to be one of the greatest men... to ever grace the earth. ... He was **Jacob**... the great patriarch of God's people (believers in the true and living God.) ... He was the very person who was chosen by God... to father the promised **Seed** (the twelve tribes of Israel... and the very special seed - the Savior of the world.)

What a contrast from the day when he bowed himself seven times before Esau! ... (That was during his "Canaan phase of his spiritual walk.") ... But there is no cringing and fawning here. ... Jacob carries himself as a child of God. ... He was a son of the King of kings... and ambassador of the Most High. ... Joseph does not operate from abstract proposition.

Although no one has more power in Egypt than Pharaoh... the one who is in a covenant relationship with God... is greater ... because the God of the covenant... is greater than the gods of Egypt. ... (LISTEN!) ... It is better to be part of God's kingdom... than to be the King of any earthly kingdom.

Come alive! My friend. Don't let this be merely abstract proposition!

Genesis 47:8

At this point... if Jacob were living according to his former nature in Canaan (operating by abstract proposition)... he would have said:

"Well, Pharaoh, I am 130 years old, and I want to tell you what I have accomplished in my lifetime. I would like to tell you how I outsmarted my brother when I was a young fellow and how I became rich by outsmarting my father-in-law."

And he might have bragged about his family -- "*I've got twelve sons... That's more than most... We ran one of the largest ranches in all of Canaan.*" ... He could have gone on and on. But Jacob is a different man now. Listen to him -

Genesis 47:9

Notice how changed this man Jacob is. He says that he is 130 years old and his life is really nothing to brag about. "*Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life.*" ... He humbly confesses things to Pharaoh.

He says he doesn't measure up to his fathers. ... I "*have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning.*"

Isn't this a changed man? ... It doesn't sound like the old Jacob - does it? He's giving glory to God for his life... and he is making no boast that he has accomplished a great deal.

Jacob doesn't brag - he is just a sinner... saved by the grace of God.

You know what... perhaps this is how we can tell if we are living according to abstract proposition... instead of complete trust in God's Word. ... Our desire to boast will diminish. We will be far more inclined to tell the truth. We would say that we are just a bunch of sinners and we haven't anything to brag about... except a wonderful Savior... Who has been gracious and patient with us... down through the years. ... He would be **all** that any of us have to boast about.

Come alive! My friend. Don't let this be merely abstract proposition!

Jacob's words are a striking confession. ... The evil of which Jacob speaks... is a recognition that he had not honored God - *as had his fathers Abraham and Isaac.* ... Jacob's words reflect the natural sadness of his heart. ... He knows that his sins have found him out.

And notice the word "sojourning" (meg-heur-im). It means to live as a stranger or a nomad upon earth. ... He had never owned much land... or settled at any place upon earth for a long period of time. ... Jacob reveals to Pharaoh... (what the writer of Hebrews tells us)... his mindset was. Hebrews includes Jacob in a listing of men of faith and then says this:

Hebrews 11:13-16 (ESV)

¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Jacob had come alive! His faith was no longer an abstract proposition.

Genesis 47:10

Jacob blesses Pharaoh twice!

Genesis 47:11-12

We are to see that Jacob and his family prospered... and the next 13 verses will contrast the Israelites prosperity with the rest of the world's dire condition. The writer of Genesis wants us to notice this contrast. Look what he writes immediately after he describes the Egyptian grim situation.

Genesis 47:27-28

Things got so bad for the Egyptians that the people were willing to sacrifice everything... in order to stay alive. (We will see them come and ask Joseph to favor them... by imposing some very harsh-looking conditions on them. And then... they will show their gratitude to Joseph when he does!) ... Land... possessions... and their freedom are ultimately taken from them and given to Pharaoh... by their request.

Now... I want to say something... before we look at this grim situation... which contrasts the favor shown to the Israelites.

This passage (as a contrast to Jacob's family) foreshadows the return of Christ. **Come alive! My friend. Don't let this be merely abstract proposition!**

Jesus will come back to an exhausted... impoverished... bankrupt earth. ... The terrible ecological disasters described in the Book of Revelation... as "the Great Tribulation"... will have taken their toll. ... Earthquakes... wars... famines... pandemics... and natural disasters of global magnitude... will entirely deplete the world of its resources. ... The persecutions of the beast will decimate the world's population.

By the time Christ returns... the earth will have exhausted itself... and men will have come to an end of themselves. ... Apart from Christ there will be no hope. His rule will be absolute law on the planet... and gladly accepted by all who enter the millennial Kingdom. ... Jesus' reign (like Joseph's)... will be rigorous... the reign of a rod of iron.

Now... (as for the family of Jacob)... just as we see here in Genesis... there will be a contrast. The Thousand Year Reign of Christ at His return (known as the Millennium) will be the promised Kingdom that is discussed all though the Old Testament. At Jesus' first-coming the Jewish nation rejected the Messiah... so the promised Kingdom was postponed until His second coming. All of the covenant blessings promised to Israel will come true. They will be re-gathered in the Land of Israel and have their borders extend to the exact measure that was promised to Abraham (something that has never happened... but finally will.)

The city of Jerusalem will be the center of the world's government (Jeremiah 31:31-34). It will be exalted and its geography will be altered (Zechariah 14:10.) It will be a place of great glory (Isaiah 24:23)... and the joy of the whole earth (Psalm 48:2.) King David apparently will be resurrected and have an important role in this new kingdom (Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 37:24-25.) God's favored people will be honored – distinct from the rest of the world. The Great Tribulation will bring them back to Himself. God has not abandoned His people – just as He will never abandon you and I (even though we fail Him.)

Come alive! My friend. Don't let this be merely abstract proposition!

Genesis 47:13-26

Joseph was generous. Anyone who has been a tenant farmer would be envious of these arrangements. Most tenant farmers are on a fifty/fifty agreement. They got to keep 4/5th of what they earned. To work with an eighty (*tenant*) / twenty (*owner*) arrangement... was very freeing to the Egyptians. Joseph was not fleecing the citizenry... nor was he a dictator whose cruelty and greed destroyed their incentive to grow food. Quite the opposite.

These policies saved their lives... and the Egyptians were very grateful. It meant that they could not only LIVE... but they could do very well for themselves (just as they had under the seven years of plenty... before the famine – when Joseph put them under the same conditions.) Joseph goes back to the system that they were already used to. They are no longer subject to arbitrary extractions. Joseph normalized it for them. (Don't you

wish someone would normalize our taxes (?) – instead of seeing them indiscriminately increase so often.)

Far from being an oppressive overlord... Joseph is considered by the people to be a savior. The Egyptians (indeed) were brought to an end of themselves. They had been brought to the place where total and unquestioning trust had to be placed in him.

Just like this... in a coming day... all sources of power will be concentrated in One Person. A desperate world will willingly give up their rebellion and independence... and submit with total trust in Jesus. ... He will dispense the world's wealth - to the benefit of all. ... (It is the true Socialist's dream)... Socialism tries to FORCE people to do what the Egyptians asked for and did willingly... and people of the Millennium will do willingly.

Socialism can never work like this... because there can never be an administrator that comes CLOSE to the caliber of Jesus (and to a lesser degree – Joseph.) Such a system will never work (again) until Jesus returns. We have much cause to fear... if lesser hands than Jesus or Joseph wield such power. ... Those hands were completely dependable and could be trusted to the full.

Genesis 47:29-31

Here again we see the enlivened faith of Jacob. If he had weak faith... or little hope in God's promises to him and his fathers... what difference would it make where he was buried...? ... His faith looks a little strange to us because the hope of the Old Testament is an earthly hope.

Abraham believed that he would be raised from the dead in the Promised Land (Canaan)... so he had his wife (and himself) buried there. Isaac believed the same. And now Jacob is expressing identical faith. ... The hope in the Old Testament... was not to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Jesus will not reveal this... until centuries later.

The hope of the Old Testament is in a Messianic Kingdom... which they thought would be set up on this earth. ... They expected that they would be resurrected and then live forever in the Promised Land... experiencing God's wonderful kingdom. ... Jacob was showing his strong belief in what he knew of God's promises. He hopes to be raised from the dead and live forever in the Promised Land.

Of course... for believers today... it makes no difference where we are buried. ... At the time of the Rapture... wherever we are... we will be raised... and our bodies will join our spirits... (that is... if we have died before the Rapture takes place.) ... If we are still living... then we shall be changed and caught up to meet the Lord in the air. ... So it won't make any difference if we are buried in Egypt or in Canaan... or in Portland... or in Los Angeles.

The hope of the Old Testament was an earthly hope. The hope of the New Testament (because of progressive revelation)... is a heavenly hope.

Do you have it...? **Come alive! My friend. Don't let this be merely abstract proposition!**

Just as the Egyptians had **nothing else** but to place their trust and hope in Joseph... come to see that you are in the same situation... Only you have some One much **better** than Joseph!

One day every knee **is** going to bow to Jesus. Don't wait for that coming day. (You see) **only** 1/3 of the earth's residents will live through the Great Tribulation... and you have no way to know if you will be one of them. Or your life can be taken BEFORE the Tribulation comes. And then (of course) it will be too late.

But you can know **this** for certain - God is perfectly working out His plan on the earth today. ... Place all of your trust and hope in Jesus! Give up your rebellion and independence. ... **Come alive! My friend. Don't let this be merely abstract proposition!**

And for any who are struggling to live their Christian faith by their own strength... like Joseph before he came down to Egypt... **Come alive! My friend. Stop living as though God's Word is abstract proposition!**

Christ is about to return. Fill your heart and mind with God's Word and submit all your ways to it.