

**Scripture Reading: Genesis 46:26 – 47:**

**“26 All the persons who went with Jacob to Egypt, who came from his body, besides Jacob’s sons’ wives, were sixty-six persons in all. 27 And the sons of Joseph who were born to him in Egypt were two persons. All the persons of the house of Jacob who went to Egypt were seventy. 28 Then he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out before him the way to Goshen. And they came to the land of Goshen. 29 So Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; and he presented himself to him, and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while. 30 And Israel said to Joseph, “Now let me die, since I have seen your face, because you are still alive.” 31 Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father’s household, “I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and say to him, ‘My brothers and those of my father’s house, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me. 32 And the men are shepherds, for their occupation has been to feed livestock; and they have brought their flocks, their herds, and all that they have.’ 33 So it shall be, when Pharaoh calls you and says, ‘What is your occupation?’ 34 that you shall say, ‘Your servants’ occupation has been with livestock from our youth even till now, both we and also our fathers,’ that you may dwell in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.” 47: 1 Then Joseph went and told Pharaoh, and said, “My father and my brothers, their flocks and their herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; and indeed they are in the land of Goshen.” 2 And he took five men from among his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh. 3 Then Pharaoh said to his brothers, “What is your occupation?” And they said to Pharaoh, “Your servants are shepherds, both we and also our fathers.” 4 And they said to Pharaoh, “We have come to dwell in the land, because your servants have no pasture for their flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now therefore, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen.” 5 Then Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, “Your father and your brothers have come to you. 6 The land of Egypt is before you. Have your father and brothers dwell in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. ”**

## **''The Best of the Land''**

**This morning I hope to bring together the three lessons that I believe are very important for all of us as we journey with God in history today as the Spirit of God works to fill the whole earth with the Kingdom of Jesus. We were sent on this journey by Jesus in the Great Commission in the same way that Abraham’s family was sent to Egypt where God promised to make them a great nation. It should be obvious that world conquest is a task that is overwhelming and I suspect that we each individually would certainly think we were NOT up to the task...**

- This is why we considered that important lesson about NOT being troubled by our past sins & failures as we play our roles in God’s story!**

**Joseph told his brothers to not be troubled along the way and we must remember that Jesus has sent the Comforter for us as well. Last week we saw God reminding Jacob about the journey that lay just ahead for he and his family and God told him to not fear going there:**

- And thus we learned that we must not be afraid as we look at the incredible challenges God may put in our paths.**
- And so this week we will consider the implications of the Great Commission and Lord willing how our family history given here in the Book of Beginnings helps us to better understand what God is doing in history today!**
- So just where do I see the Great Commission in this climax of Jacob’s journey to Egypt?**

**I believe it should come to mind with the references to the best land in Egypt that we saw twice in chapter 45 and now twice again in chapter 47.**

Pharaoh had told Joseph to bring his family down to Egypt and that they would be given the best of the land. In our morning text we see the final details of their journey. In verse 28 we read, “Then he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out before him the way to Goshen.”

It is very appropriate that Judah, whose family would bring forth Jesus, should lead the way to the best land! We then see an emotional reunion between a father and his long-lost favorite son...

29 “So Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; and he presented himself to him, and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while. 30 And Israel said to Joseph, “Now let me die, since I have seen your face, because you are still alive.”

Joseph then arranges for a number of his brothers to meet Pharaoh so they can confirm that Jacob and his family will live in Goshen, the best of the land and tend their flocks.

We see that confirmation in verse 5: Then Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, “Your father and your brothers have come to you. 6 The land of Egypt is before you. Have your father and brothers dwell in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. ”

And the fact that they receive the best of the land is again confirmed in verse 11: “And Joseph situated his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded.” So, what should we think of when we hear a phrase like ‘the best of the land?’

- Are we supposed to only think about some good pasture land in Goshen as a narrow reading of the text would point us to?

While this is certainly true, if we are students of the Scriptures & understand how God is telling a grand story, then much more should come to mind!

- We should see this as a precursor for the history of the Nation of Israel and their later conquest of Canaan: The Promised Land!

And we should also see it as a reminder of the greater story that God is telling. Thus, when we see references to land in the Scriptures, and especially when it is referred to as the best land, or The Promised Land, we will find that it is closely related to God’s grand story. It is important to remember that God has always related to His Creation with covenants that involve land and people!

Think back to the opening chapters of the Bible and what do we find?

- God makes a special place for man in the Garden of Eden and then offers him the entire world!

What had small beginnings was intended to grow into a worldwide event with Adam’s family filling the whole earth and ruling righteously! What went wrong?

- Yes, sin disrupted God’s plan, but it did not destroy God’s plan because if we turn to the final chapters of the Bible, what do we find?

A Garden-City that has filled the whole earth inhabited by all the righteous Saints of all the ages...

The final culmination of the prayer that Jesus instructed us to lift up: ‘Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!’

- So how does our account fit into this grand story that flows from Genesis chapter three to the final chapters of Revelation?

God promised redemption even before Adam and Eve could repent, confirming that we love God because He first loved us.

- God then cast them out of the Garden into the world!

He did so not to be mean but rather so He could work out their salvation in history and not have them partake of the Tree of Life & live forever in their fallen state. *[remember, we learned that God works on His time-table and not ours!]* We then saw the sinfulness of sin as the human race destroyed the earth in just nine generations and after the flood God calls Abraham and promises that the Seed of the Woman who would crush the head of Satan would come from his family.

- God promised Abraham land and a great nation, just as the Father would later promise His Son!

Now here is where the proper context is important: If this ‘best of the land’ relates only to what Jacob and his family receive then it is a sad story: That sojourn in Egypt would end badly with God’s people thrown into slavery, becoming a bunch of grumblers, and learning habits of idolatry that they could not shake even in the wilderness. But knowing the big story, we see that God was not finished with them because they were going to inherit an even greater land: The Promised Land!

- But again, IF we see this only in the context of the Old Testament people it is again a very sad story!

They never really conquer the land the way they should have, they fall prey to more idolatry, they choose human kings over God and eventually must be cast off in exile even after reaching the Golden age of King Solomon.

- Yes, God is accomplishing His purposes but the Old Testament is largely the story of decline and remnant none the less.

**BUT**, God’s prophets clearly show us that things will be quite different in the New Covenant era...

- As we learned over and over again in our study of Luke’s orderly account, the coming of Jesus changed everything!

This is a critical shift that sadly is missed by many in the Church today: The New Covenant, in contrast with the old, is a story of victories and expansion that continues until the Kingdom of Jesus fills the whole earth.

- Carrying out what was God’s plan from the very beginning!

In Daniel chapter two we learn from the interpretation of the King’s dream that all the Gentile empires that were under the control of Satan were crushed by Jesus when He came to establish His Kingdom. Jesus begins His earthly ministry by proclaiming that His Kingdom had come and that Kingdom will grow until it fills the whole earth. This was clearly taught by Psalms 2 & 110 in the Old Testament and confirmed by the Apostle Paul in the 15th Chapter of First Corinthians and the writer of Hebrews when he also declares in the opening chapter, “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they...”  
13 But to which of the angels has He ever said: “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool?””

- This is why remembering Ascension Sunday is so important because Jesus is seated at the Father’s right hand today and the Spirit is bringing all His enemies under His feet!

As Mike and I have often pointed out, Psalm 110:1 is the most quoted verse in the New Testament!

Earlier this week Joel McDurmon discussed this and just for comparison, pointed out the *second* most frequently-quoted verse “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). Joel says “This shows up in seven different places in the NT. However, he says Psalm 110:1 is quoted or alluded to 23 times in the NT. It is quoted in 11 out of 27 NT books, and by 7 of the 9 NT authors.

- I think it is something that God wants us to notice!

**We spoke about this as we finished the Book of Acts and considered how the Apostle Paul was marched into Rome on the road used by conquering generals & where he even as a prisoner preached the Kingdom of God, no one hindering him! And where did such confidence come from?**

- **From the sure promises of God!**

**Yes, Paul was likely chained to a Roman soldier under house arrest awaiting his trial before Emperor Nero... Yes, Rome ruled all of the known world at that time with an iron fist... BUT Paul knew the rest of the story! The Apostle Paul knew that Rome had already been struck by Jesus, the stone cut without hands seen in the King's dream and interpreted by Daniel: That mighty empire would soon be as chaff in the wind! Paul served Jesus whose Kingdom had been firmly established...**

- **A Kingdom that would now fill the whole earth!**

**Do you think some may have thought Paul was crazy or at least delusional? Do you think there were some in that day who tried to "spiritualize" the words of Jesus or Daniel thinking that to apply them to REAL history would require WAY too much faith?**

- **Who in that time could imagine the destruction of Jerusalem or the fall of the Roman Empire?**

**Paul not only could, but was confident about where history was going! Could he give all the details? NO! BUT he knew that in a very short period of time BOTH events would be recorded acts of history that future Saints would look back on. This is why it is important to see the Book of Acts as the story of how the Spirit of God is going to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus and why accounts like Jacob's family coming to the best of the land can encourage us!**

- **It is what gives us the confidence to believe the Great Commission!**

**You see, if I ask for a show of hands for those who believe the promises of God, I assume that all our hands would go up, but here we are talking about real confidence in those promises.**

- **Paul was not worried about the restrictions of his residence or even that chain because he knew it would not last long!**

**Soon Rome would be gone and the Church would be advancing!**

**It is a sad state of affairs today, when we who can look BACK on history and see that the very events that Paul believed would happen soon DID in fact happen, but at the same time are those who fail to believe the promises as they apply to us today?**

**I have often encouraged us to consider just how difficult it would have been for those listening to Paul there in Rome to imagine what pagan Europe would look like in a thousand years! [not just pagan Rome, but the barbarians as well!] Over the next thousand years, what the world now calls the 'dark ages' brought forth Christendom with universities, music, art, limited government, medicine and science that began to confirm the promise of Jesus that we would do His miracles and even greater miracles.**

**And then imagine a discussion after those first thousand years about the rumors of "new worlds," [perhaps in one of those Cathedrals]: Who could have imagined what God would do over the next five or six hundred years!**

**So with that in mind, I want to leave us with the challenge to be like the Apostle Paul, "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him."**

- **Where should such confidence come from?**
- **The Word of God of course!**

Including the lessons we have learned about not being troubled along the way nor fearing where God is taking us. We must read and believe the promises made to Abraham which tell us that through his Seed Jesus, all the nations of the earth would be blessed! Read and believe the interpretation of the King's dream in Daniel chapter two... Yes, I mean the part about the Kingdom filling the whole earth, truly giving us the best of the land!

- Read and believe the Great Commission knowing that we are called upon to disciple the nations!

Read and believe the vision of history that Paul shared with the Saints in Corinth when he explained to them the real power of the resurrection of Jesus:

**“20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.**

**22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign UNTIL He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.”**

- This is the confidence that we should have today!

The early Saints believed the promises of God and in many cases laid down their lives to advance the Kingdom when it was much harder to see how history would unfold.

Today we have some BIG promises to believe, like all the nations being given to Jesus as was promised in Psalm 110 or the Church as the Bride of Jesus coming as Paul promised in Ephesians chapter 4: “to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

- And yes, it means ALL the Saints, from all quarters of Christendom, which in my mind is very similar to asking Paul or the other 1st Century Saints to believe that Rome would fall!

Yes, these are BIG promises and from a human standpoint almost impossible to believe...

- But it is not we who must fulfill them, but the God that we serve.

The same God who accomplished the events that were promised to Abraham and now being carried out by Jacob and Joseph here in Egypt.

He must be the source of our confidence as we believe that God the Holy Spirit will bring glory to the Son by filling the whole earth with His Kingdom...

That is the story of the Book of Acts...

- A story that continues right down to our day and a story in which God has an important part for each of us to play!

And I want to close with this important point: Some parts seem to be grand parts and others simple parts, but they are all important to God's work...

A visit on Wednesday from my old friend Jay Grimstead reminded me of this as he spoke of a recent conversation with Chinese business men!

I have often made the point that as we remember what God did in history for Europe and then the Americas, we should be sensitive to what the Spirit seems to be doing in Africa or Asia today, including China.

Obviously, we should see a man like Hudson Taylor as a major figure as the founder of the China Inland Mission that brought hundreds of missionaries to China. Even the world gives him a prominent Wikipedia story.

The quieter story that has many, many obscure players is the explosive growth of the underground Church in the midst of massive persecution by the communists.

You see we should believe that just as those brutal Roman Emperors faded from history and the Church grew, so it will be for China... Not with a revolution or political action, but by faithful Saints living faithful lives.

Whatever we might think of Emperor Constantine, he did not make the Way an accepted religion because he wanted more Christians, he did so because the Christians had already become a dominant part of Roman life.

What Jay shared reminded me of just how such change occurs in God's good timing...

The self-avowed communists who run the industrial machine in China had a confession to make to Jay in the course of their discussion... They are quietly seeking out and hiring Christians from the underground churches!

Why would communist running their factories do such a thing? Because these Christians are honest, hard-working and trustworthy people who greater benefited their companies.

➤ Will China be a 'Christian nation' that has been brought under the feet of Jesus in my lifetime?

The Lord only knows, but what I can know is that it will happen and happen on His timetable as the Saints there do the Lord's Work in the Lord's Way!

**Communion Meditation: Hebrews 1**

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they”