

Genesis 47

- May the words...
- It's great to be able to join you in your journey through Genesis.
- And perhaps mainly for my benefit, let me just summarise where you've been and where we are.
- The first 11 chapters of Genesis tell us about foundational events: creation, fall, flood and the tower of Babel.
- From chapter 12 onwards we read the stories of foundational people: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob...
- ...and from chapter 37 onwards, Joseph.
- Joseph's story is one about a beloved son in Canaan, sold and shamed by his brothers, and taken to Egypt.
- Here he becomes a trusted steward, but is then framed by Potiphar's wife, and is forgotten by the butler who he helped to find freedom.
- The Pharaoh has a vision, Joseph and his ability to interpret dreams is remembered – he is vindicated and exalted from his prison cell.
- And then we have the story of three visits to Egypt to buy grain.
- The first visit of the brothers in chapter 42, then Benjamin joins them on their second visit, chapters 43-45.
- And then in chapter 46 we read of a third and final visit to Egypt, and it's the story of that visit that continues into today's passage – chapter 47.

[The final three chapters of Genesis are the final acts in the story of Jacob and Joseph. In chapter 48 Jacob blesses (there's that theme again) the two sons of Joseph, and in chapter 49 he blesses and prophesies over his own twelve sons. In chapter 50, firstly Jacob dies and is buried, as promised, back in Canaan, and then Joseph dies, and is buried in Egypt.]

- It's interesting, as we look at these three visits, there are some similarities.
- Each journey comes about following a decision made by Jacob.
- Each has a climax of Joseph meeting members of his family.
- And interestingly, in each of the accounts Jacob mentions his death.
- But in this third visit, there are also some differences too.
- Back in chapter 46 (v2-4), Jacob had a vision, and this was the encouragement, that he needed to join his sons.
- In his eyes, this was confirmation that this move to Egypt, was indeed of God.
- Then in verses 8-27 of the previous chapter, we have the long list of Jacob's descendants who travel with him.
- This is clearly a decision not just to relocate temporarily, but rather that this is a long-term move.
- This is a place where they will settle.
- And we find another difference in verses 13-26 of chapter 47, today's passage.
- The great famine is the backdrop to all three of the visits, but only in this account do we read about its devastating impacts.
- But not only do we read about the challenge of the famine, we also see how the words of Joseph, spoken to his brothers on their second visit, are fulfilled.
- In Genesis 45:5,7 Joseph, when he makes himself known to them, graciously lets them know that what they intended for evil, God has been able to use for good.
- He says to them: "Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you... God sent me ahead... to save your lives by a great deliverance."
- And in chapter 47:25, we read about how these words are fulfilled as all the people of Egypt proclaimed about Joseph: "You have saved our lives."

- I'm sure as you've had preachers work their way through Genesis you will have heard people talk about how Joseph is a 'type' of Jesus.
- A character in the Bible who points to Jesus, and here we see how Joseph is seen as a rescuer, a saviour...
- Not just for the people of God, his family, but also for others too.
- In Joseph's case, the people of Egypt – for Jesus, the whole world.
- From the beginning of the Bible to its end, God gives reveals to us his salvation plan.
- In Genesis 3:15, immediately after the fall, God says to the serpent, "he will crush your head".
- The second Adam, Jesus, would have victory over evil, over sin and death, and be our saviour.
- And here again, as the people cry out to Joseph "you have saved our lives", we catch a glimpse once again of that divine rescue plan.
- So... that's a bit of a broad overview of where today's passage sits in the context of the rest of Genesis, of the Joseph story, and in the grand narrative of the whole of Scripture.
- But let's now take a closer look and spend a bit more time in the chapter itself...
- And, because my role within the team is as a mission facilitator, I want to particularly think about some of the missional lessons we can learn from it.
- So in the first six verses of the chapter we are a fly on the wall as Joseph presents five of his brothers to Pharaoh.
- And in verse 3 we read: "Pharaoh asked the brothers, 'What is your occupation?'".
- If you can remember from last week, and the previous chapter, this is exactly as Joseph had predicted.
- Genesis 46:33-34 – "When Pharaoh calls you in and asks: 'what is your occupation?' you should answer 'we are shepherds.'"
- And that is indeed how they answer, and Pharaoh responds as Joseph had indicated he would and lets them settle in the land of Goshen.
- Even asking the most able amongst them to take charge of his own livestock.
- There are a few things in this encounter for us to learn, I think.
- Firstly, it's good to be prepared!
- Joseph, despite knowing that God was with him, that God had spoken to him, didn't leave anything to chance.
- He knew Pharaoh, he knew the Egyptian culture, and he therefore knew how best to approach the situation, and how to give themselves the best opportunity to achieve the desired result.
- Over Easter, as a number of us engaged in the 123GO initiative – sharing 1 gospel, 2 by 2, over 3 days – we were prepared.
- We learned from those, like my evangelist colleague Chris Duffett, that it's best to bless first, and to tell later...
- To listen first, and then to prayerfully wait for an invitation to share the good news.
- Or as 1 Peter 3:15 says: *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect"*
- Our involvement in the missional purposes of God don't just happen – we need to be intentional about being prepared for them, in being ready for them, so that we recognise them when we see them, and so that we are equipped to do this well...
- And part of that preparation is our godly living, our openness to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, to be distinctive in our humanness, our fullness of life, our hope, our love.
- It is this – the daily walk with Jesus, his likeness in our lives, the radiance of being in his presence – that will prompt people to ask in the first place...
- There's another lesson here, when we are walking in obedience to God, and following his lead, we can be bold.
- Not confident in our own ability, or arrogant, proud or rude, but graciously and gently courageous.
- v4 "Even though we come 'as immigrants'" that's literally what the Hebrew means here "please let your servants settle in Goshen."
- And Pharaoh says to Joseph: "Yes – settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land." (v6)

- Based upon Joseph's service, and the relationship that has developed, Pharaoh is willing to respond generously.
- So, let's be prepared, and let's be bold...
- Next, we turn to verses 7-10 where it's Jacob's turn to meet Pharaoh...
- *"Then Joseph brought his father Jacob in and presented him before Pharaoh. After Jacob blessed Pharaoh, Pharaoh asked him, "How old are you?"*
- And it would be easy to miss something really important here... *"After Jacob blessed Pharaoh" v7.*
- Indeed, if we quickly skip to the end of these few verses it's there at the end too...
- *"Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from his presence."* v10.
- This encounter between the patriarch and the Egyptian king is one bookmarked by blessing.
- And blessing is a key theme throughout Genesis – and elsewhere in Scripture.
- The word is found 65 times in Genesis.
- God blesses in chapter 1: *"God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number.."*
- And in God's covenant with Abraham in chapter 12 he says: *"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing... all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*
- And, Jacob's story too, is one founded upon blessing – in his case, a blessing he 'stole' from his brother Esau.
- What do we mean by blessing?
- When others say "Good luck" or "I wish you every success" – the person of God, talks more of blessing.
- In Hebrew there are words that have the same roots, the same 'consonants' that form them, and it is often helpful to look at these family of words.
- And the words that 'bless' is related to are: *"be fruitful, multiply, create..."*
- The sense of well-being, shalom, wholeness, health, of good harvests, of human flourishing...
- And this... is what God desires for his people, indeed this is what God desire for all humanity...
- Indeed, there's this cycle of blessing...
- As we are blessed, we become a blessing to others; and as they are blessed, we find blessing too.
- This is what God is communicating when he speaks through the prophet Jeremiah when the people of Israel are taken into exile in Babylonia.
- Jeremiah 29:7 *"Also seek the peace and prosperity [the blessing] of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers [is blessed] you too will prosper [be blessed]."*
- We can sometimes be limited in our thinking that God's mission is to be found solely in the flourishing and the wellbeing of the churches in this town.
- That the mission of God is the same thing as seeing flourishing churches, as seeing many people becoming Christians.
- Those are certainly good things, and such fruitfulness will be a sign of God's blessing.
- But if that is all we are seeking after, we will more than likely fail to see it.
- Jacob knows that the blessing of God's people is inextricably linked to the blessing of Egypt.
- Just as those words in Jeremiah remind God's people that their prosperity was inextricably linked to the blessing of Babylon – the home of their enemies.
- The flourishing of the church, in all its forms in this town of March, is to be found in the flourishing of this town.
- Just as St. Francis paraphrases the Bible – *"It is in giving that we receive"*.
- I believe that we will see blessing in the church only in the measure that we seek blessing for our town.
- When we contribute to its wellbeing – physical, mental, emotional – not just spiritual.
- When we contribute to its regeneration and renewal – practical and financial – not just spiritual.
- When we contribute to its healing and restoration – relationally, not just spiritually.
- We misread the Bible and we misunderstand Jesus if we think God's only interested in people's souls.
- And so, as Jacob meets Pharaoh, he blesses him – as he arrives, and as he leaves...
- And Pharaoh asks him how old he is.

- And Jacob says 130!
- Long-life was seen as a sign of God’s blessing, and Pharaoh would have been pleased to have received a blessing from someone who had been blessed with 130 years.
- But Jacob himself calls those years – “few and difficult” – and he compares himself unfavourably to his forefathers.
- Maybe because he stole the blessing intended for his older brother, that blessing had been double edged for Jacob.
- His long life has been filled with more than its fair share of trouble, and now he finds himself and his family having to leave the land of Canaan that God had given to his grandfather Abraham, to take refuge in a foreign land.
- Maybe he’s learned through his pilgrimage of a long life that greed isn’t the answer, but rather that generosity is.
- And he blesses Pharaoh.
- Even in the midst of famine.
- And so we move on to verses 11-26 where we read about the famine and about how the wisdom of Joseph guided Egypt, and those who were seeking refuge amongst them, through it.
- It was a severe famine, and we read in these verses how Joseph’s plan to save grain in the bountiful years, helped them all to survive through the difficult years.
- First of all, grain from these reserves are given to people in exchange for money.
- But the famine continues.
- So next, people start mortgaging their herds in exchange for grain.
- But the famine continues.
- And so, finally, the people mortgage their land, and their time and service, in exchange for grain.
- Grain which they are given to eat and to sow, on the basis that they returned a fifth to Pharaoh.
- Just like an income tax this was designed to replenish the stocks of grain as Egypt emerged from the famine.
- And as a result, the people are saved, and they praise Joseph for his wise leadership.
- And as Egypt not only survived, but prospered, so did, v27 the Israelites in Goshen who *“acquired property, were fruitful and increased greatly in number.”*
- They blessed and as they blessed they in turn were blessed...
- And as we come towards the end of the chapter Jacob talks about returning to Canaan.
- But not with his family, nor while he is alive, but just to be buried.
- [Lisa – from the West Indies and wants me to take her back and bury her there, she’s already got a plot at Springfields Cemetery in St. Kitts, next to her parents...]
- And Joseph promises to bury his father with his forefather, back in Canaan.
- And we end the chapter with this lovely image of a happy old man, living the remainder of his 147 years, leaning on his staff, worshipping his God.
- Let us pray...

Prayers

- We pray for people experiencing famine, and the impacts of climate change.
- We pray for those forced to flee their homes and find refuge and hospitality elsewhere.
- We pray for our nation, for our government, and for the wisdom and integrity of Joseph for those in leadership.
- We pray blessing over our town. We pray...
- For its wellbeing – physical, mental, emotional – not just spiritual.
- For its regeneration and renewal – practical and financial – not just spiritual.
- For its healing and restoration – relationally, not just spiritually.
- We pray for our churches – that as they bless this town in the name of Jesus, they too would be blessed.

- That as March flourishes and is fruitful, so too would our churches, as they engage in the mission of God, also find flourishing and growth and the fruit of lives transformed by an encounter with Jesus.
- We pray that just as the people of Egypt looked to Joseph and found help, that the people of March would look to Jesus and find the salvation that is found only in Him...