

The Joseph Story | Broken Family/Beautiful Plan

The End of Jacob's Journey (Part One)

Genesis 46.1-5, 28-30; 47.5-10, 29-31

October 27, 2013

So Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. ² God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." ³ He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. ⁴ "I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes." ⁵ Then Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob and their little ones and their wives in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him.

Now (Jacob) sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out the way before him to Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen. ²⁹ Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; as soon as he appeared before him, he fell on his neck and wept on his neck a long time. ³⁰ Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive."

^{47.5} Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. ⁶ "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." ⁷ Then Joseph brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. ⁸ Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many years have you lived?" ⁹ So Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; 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." ¹⁰ And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from his presence.

²⁹ When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called 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, ³⁰ 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." ³¹ He said, "Swear to me." So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed.

We've been looking at the long section at the end of The Book of Genesis that records the story of Jacob and his twelve sons...especially Jacob's favored son, Joseph... and Judah, the son who was chosen to lead...and gifted to lead...but who rejected that calling and ran from it...but God always runs faster... and God caught Judah and eventually Judah answers the call.

We've seen that Joseph was a kind of placeholder for Judah. While Judah was unwilling to serve his family and unwilling to lead them into truth and faith and love...God put Joseph in that

position of leadership until the day when Judah faced his flaws and saw his need for a kind of right-ness that only God can provide... And after that, Judah began to change into the prince God called him to be.

This is the third trip into Egypt... Jacob has done his share of traveling in his life and been on an ongoing pilgrimage...but he's old now and he's been told that his long lost son, Joseph, is alive and that Jacob's whole family (his children, their spouses and grandchildren) are wanted in Egypt and now. And in his old age, he has to launch out into the unknown, the Big City. Can you teach an old dog new tricks? Is there YET another adventure in old Jacob? Will he be accepted in Egypt...and even be recognized by his son Joseph? Will he settle there? Will he ever get back to "ha aretz", the Land that God had promised his family?

These are the questions facing Jacob or "Israel" (as God renamed him)... AND it reminds US that the life of the believer requires...well...BELIEF. It reminds us that we too are on pilgrimage...in fact maybe God is calling YOU to some new step of belief, step of faith and the same kind of insecurities that faced old Jacob are also facing you.

So let's see if this Joseph Story, Judah Story and Jacob Story can help US. Let's look at: **1. A Disruptive Call to Move** **2. The Essential Rest-Stop** and **3. First Steps for YOU**

Looking back on Jacob's life...we see that he's always been on the move. He had to run from his enraged brother Esau...and go all the way back to Babylon. Then he ran from his father-in-law, Laban.

Jacob was a manipulative man...a deceiver...and so he had to keep plotting and scheming and moving... But it was also what GOD wanted for him and for all God's people. They were to be MOVERS...to be pilgrims and sojourners... They were shepherds (like Abel) and when Abraham and Isaac found wives for their sons they could not choose the women of the land (who were rooted and at HOME in Canaan) – they had to choose immigrant women who traveled to the Promised Land (not born there). Had to have a pilgrim spirit!

God wants instilled in His people this sense that their only home is the home God gives them...that this world can be a kind of inn or hotel for us but not the real place of deep rest and satisfaction we crave.

And now...in his retirement...Jacob is called by Pharaoh and by circumstances – which seem to be CLEARLY orchestrated by God – Jacob has to MOVE once again: "Once a pilgrim always a pilgrim". It says in the opening words, in the Hebrew language, "And Jacob journeyed onward..." – not the construction we expect. Literally, "he pulled up" – like tent pegs.

And THIS emphasis is consistent through the whole Bible: the people who belong to Israel's God are pilgrim people. And that very imagery is used in the New Testament as well – "strangers and exiles on the earth."(Heb 11); "I write to those who reside as aliens, scattered" (1Peter 1.1)

“conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile” (1Peter 1.17); “I urge you as sojourners and exiles” (1Peter 2.11).

Jesus Christ will tell His disciples “Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to keep his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life shall preserve it.” (Luke 17.32-33) the woman, Lot's wife, whose city was being judged by God for their excesses and crookedness and as she was fleeing for her life and she looked back because her life was there...she couldn't move...couldn't journey.

Hold on LOOSELY...be ready to pull up your stakes and move. Be in the world but not OF the world – not totally rooted in the purposes of this world. Be a pilgrim and a sojourner... exiles...strangers.

And you see the discomfort in Jacob. He's a nomad and a shepherd but it's always hard to pull up your stakes and move. When the sons first tell him that Joseph is alive, Jacob's paralyzed – 45.26 , “He was stunned”, literally means he couldn't feel or move.

Then he sees the technology the sons brought from the big city (the wagons of Egypt) and he knows they're telling the truth – that Joseph (after 22 years dead) turns out to be alive and it makes Jacob alive...and he wants to see his favored son...but it means he has to move...to go down to Egypt... to move into the unknown...to go DOWN and it's got to be frightening...especially for an old man.

And for all of us, this impulse to get rooted is very real. We crave rest and we want to belong and to be comfortable and safe and secure and to be in that climate-controlled, familiar place. To maintain this spiritually necessary attitude of detachment is not easy. To live in that tension, “IN the world but NOT OF the world” is not an easy posture to maintain: to be seeking the welfare of the city where God has planted us (Jer 29) and thus to be totally involved with our neighbors and civic life and the arts and relationships with coworkers and family AND to be somehow at odds with the central purposes of this system, this world.

And every once in a while...our level of detachment is put to the test and we are clearly called to “pull up the pegs” and do something uncomfortable and new and to plunge into the unknown – out of the comfort zone and DOWN in to the dark...UNKNOWN.

It may be something fairly low-level like signing up for a Home Group (December is sign up month!) and it's just a little bit of a stretch...and you're retired... your days of sojourning are past – but remember: once a pilgrim, always a pilgrim.

Or to be a part of one of our short-term mission trips... or to speak up for mercy and truth and justice at a discussion at work...and to do so may single you out as a Christian...as one of THEM.

Or something bigger – maybe you feel called to make a substantial investment of your money in regular giving to your church...or time volunteering in some ministry – deliberate generosity. Or

to tell your boss, “look, I can’t work on Sundays – I have to be in worship” Or to make war against some habit you know to be NOT what God wants for you. And maybe it does get more difficult as you get older...

So Jacob sets off for the big city...with big fears and big questions – I thought God wanted us here in THIS land, the Promised Land...will I ever get back? Is this a trap? Will we die on the way? Die in Egypt...

And on the way out...he gets to the place where he grew up...the Southern tip of the promised land, the place called Beersheba. It’s THE ESSENTIAL REST STOP... it’s where Abraham made an oath to the pagan king Abimelech...used seven sheep and thus the name Beersheba (meaning seven – a complete and unbreakable promise) It’s where Jacob’s father, Isaac, lived and set up an altar and worshiped when God spoke promises to him. It’s where Jacob deceived his father and stole the first-born status from Esau...and it’s essential for him to stop there as he pulls up the tent-pegs and journeys into this new phase of life.

And when he goes there (to Beersheba, the Place of the Promise)...God meets him and speaks these COVENANT WORDS – “Jacob, Jacob” (it’s a way of communicating dearness and affection) and it sounds a lot like what Abraham heard as he was going to sacrifice Isaac, “Abraham, Abraham!” (22.11). So, Abraham’s grandson hears his own name repeated, “Jacob, Jacob.” and he said, “Here I am.”

And He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again..."

Just as Joseph’s whole story has been a series of downs and ups...now Jacob, his father hears that he will go down and up...down to Egypt and then up again... but more important is the fact that THIS God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Israel’s God is not like the gods of the pagans who are limited to the desert or the mountains or to some restricted area – THIS GOD is as much in control of Egypt as in the Land of Promise. This is the God over all gods and who owns Pharaoh and who weighs the nations in a balance...who sits in heaven and does whatever He wants (Ps 115.1-3).

And this is a God who is willing for OUR sake to go down...When we go down, He goes with us. I will go down to Egypt with you...and will bring YOU up again. Joseph has gone down (down into the pit...down to Egypt...down to the dungeon) but the Lord of the Promise has always gone down with him. And now Jacob will take all that he has and everyone he loves and will UPROOT from all that is familiar and go down...BUT HE WILL NOT BE ALONE. God will go DOWN with him...and God will bring him up again.

We too...on our way to answering God’s call...when our pilgrim-ness is called upon and we are pushed out of our comfort-zone and beckoned into some unknown place – OUR essential rest-

stop on the way to answering God's call is Beersheba – the place of the promise. We come to that place where God first met us, at the foot of the Cross, where we see how deadly SERIOUS God is about His promise to go down WITH us.

At the Cross, He is saying, "Let this be the unwavering reminder to you...when I call you into deep waters...I am always willing to go deeper than you could ever GO...I am willing to descend into the deepest Hell in order to have YOU...I will plunge Myself into the justice that you deserved in order to rescue YOU and have you for Myself...I call you once again into that place of discomfort and unknowing ...to remind you that I am your HOME and I am your rest...let the Cross remind you...hear Me call your name twice, 'You are my beloved...journey with Me...I will be with you in the depths and I will carry you to the heights...let the Place of the Oath make it clear...let the Cross and resurrection make it clear."

Well, Jacob HAS that fresh encounter at the Place of the Promise, Beersheba, and it does indeed sustain him to journey into the unknown – God will go down with him and God will raise him again.

As they near Egypt, Jacob sends Prince Judah as his emissary and THEN the long awaited meeting: Joseph shows up in his fancy chariot to honor his father and say, "Look Dad! Look how successful and powerful I am" ...but when he sees his old dad, Joseph turns into a child again and hugs his father for a long, long time. And Jacob feels complete – "I have seen your face – my life is fulfilled! I have received the promise of God!"

Then, old man Jacob (God has gone down with him) and he meets the great Pharaoh and when asked how old he is, Jacob says, "The years of my pilgrimage and one-hundred thirty...and lots of trouble...but not as long as my father's pilgrimage" (He repeats it twice – really sees that they are the pilgrim people of God.)

And the weak, old, country nomad, the shepherd (and shepherds are loathsome to the Egyptians! 46.34), Jacob the shepherd Patriarch blesses the Pharaoh and then blesses him again – and we hear the promise to Abraham, "In your people will all the nations be blessed". The seed of Israel is now planted in Egypt and will grow up to bless the nations!

And then, this long episode ends (and we left out a good bit) with Jacob making Joseph promise to bury his bones in the Land of Promise...makes Joseph swear... "They carried me here...and when I die, they must carry me back to be buried with Isaac and Abraham in the Land we were promised!" And Joseph realizes that this is NOT just a sentimental request – it's central to the identity of this family. "Above all, we are the pilgrim people of the Promise. We are the people God rescued...given God's own oath...and we receive it BY faith...We walk by faith... live in faith AND we must die in faith. To bury me in the Land is to say, 'Lord, we believe You will give us this Land because you promised...You are the God who promises and we are Your people who believe."

Now, in the coming days, some of you may take initial steps in this walk of faith...You can only do that, you can only become a sojourner, a journeyer with God if you begin at Beersheba, the place of the oath.

You have to have an encounter with God at the place where God MOST VIVIDLY displayed His commitment to us – YOU HAVE TO COME TO THE CROSS of Jesus Christ, hear God call YOUR NAME and hear Him say, “This is for you! This is how willing I am to take the fall – I came to the bottom, I plunged into Hell itself on the Cross in order to retrieve you...and the resurrection of Jesus Christ proves that all who journey with ME, who find their home in ME...I will bring them up ...I will raise them up on the last day.

In a moment, we’re going to pray...just voice that to God...that you want to walk with Him, to follow Jesus Christ and that today you come to the Place of the Promise...that you hear Him calling your name and you are answering, “Here I am!” And that and tell someone else today. “I’ve begun the Journey!”

For many others, you ARE on pilgrimage and ARE journeying with God...But how we forget Lot’s wife...and how we need help to remain in the world but not of it...for US too the answer, the essential rest-stop is Beersheba...Coming daily to the place of the 7-fold oath where God commits to us in Jesus Christ, “I will go into this uncomfortable place with you and I will meet you there and bring you up, changed and renewed...I, who make Judah into a prince will also change **YOU** as you journey with Me.

Come again to the Place of the Promise and you will know wellness in your souls...and joy in the journey.