

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and it's good to see you all again! Naomi and I, and our kids, had a few great weeks away on vacation but it's good to come back a little bit more tanned, and with a significant amount of rest and refreshing.

Have you ever found that a vacation doesn't always translate into rest? I've got two active children and so there wasn't a lot of sitting around, but we were able to connect as a family, laugh a lot, and have a lot of fun. I was also able to take some time to really find my rest in God...some vacations can leave you out of breath, but resting in God penetrates down to the level of your soul. Maybe your vacation or stay-cation has left you in a state of weariness; I want to invite you this morning to find your rest in God...may He minister His peace, and His strength to every weary place.

This morning I'm going to wrap up our series in Genesis, but in many ways what you are going to hear this morning is a prequel for the series we're going to launch next week. I'll tell you more about that later, but for now, I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles to Genesis 47 (page 78 in the Blue Bibles).

As you turn there, there is something I need to say about God, right from the start: **God is a blessing God.** God loves what He has created, He looks with favour upon what He has made, He gives life, He offers grace, and He's inviting people of every nation, every language to return to Him, to receive the mercy and the forgiveness found in Jesus.

There are times when God acts in judgment, but judgment is always His last resort. 2 Peters 3:9 says that the Lord "is patient...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." In John 3:17,

Jesus said "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." God doesn't want to condemn; He wants to redeem, and reconcile, and restore. And God hasn't commissioned any of us to the ministry of condemnation...God loves the world, He loves you. And when and where judgment must be rendered, He waits to the last possible moment...giving people every opportunity to turn to Him. God is a blessing God.

If you've been tracking with us throughout the book of Genesis then you know that God's decision to bless Abraham's family, His decision to bless the nations, had nothing to do with merit and everything to do with grace. God blesses, not because we are deserving, but because it's His nature to bless.

Here we are at the end of the book of Genesis. Week after week we've been journeying with Jacob and his family, discovering that his was one broken family. The family that God called to represent Him in the world, were far from picture perfect. Over the last eight or nine weeks, we've seen that this family was filled with jealousy, infighting, deceit, murderous rage, and sexual brokenness.

But God met this family where they were; He meets us where we are. God loves you, not as you will be someday, but as you are today. Now, God's in the renovation business, and so He has plans to address our sin and brokenness, but His love isn't dependent upon our performance.

God is a blessing God...Jesus eagerly desires to bless you this morning if you would but open your heart to receive from Him.

And along with His blessing, there is something else Jesus wants to impart to you this morning...a calling.

Genesis 47 is a very special passage of Scripture; in it we see both blessing and calling. In our text this morning, we'll see that God's ultimate plans to bless the nations will not be derailed. Here in Genesis 47, we see a partial fulfillment of the promise God made two generations earlier.

You might remember that when God first called Abraham and his family, He did so with the following words in Genesis 12: "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. 2 "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. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all [nations] on earth will be blessed through you."

God planned to bless not just Abraham and his family, but the nations. And in Genesis 47, Abraham's grandson (Jacob) stood in front of the king of Egypt to speak God's blessing over him and his nation. God is faithful in keeping every promise He has ever made...God's plans to bless the nations will not be thwarted.

But before Jacob ever arrived in Egypt, his son Joseph (who he thought was dead) had already been used by God to bring blessing and rescue to the nation of Egypt. A few weeks ago, Pastor Shane walked us through Genesis 41, where God visited Pharaoh in a two-part dream. The dream outlined what was going to happen in Egypt; it was a warning about what was going to transpire. When Pharaoh woke up from the dream, he remembered it clearly but was baffled as

to its meaning. He called for the wisest men in his kingdom but no one could interpret the dream.

After some time, Joseph, who was rotting in prison on a trumped up charge, was hauled out of prison, cleaned up, and then placed before Pharaoh to interpret his dream. Joseph knew that both dreams and interpretations come from the Lord, but after hearing the dream, God made it's meaning plain to Joseph: Egypt was about to have seven years of bountiful harvest, followed by seven years of famine. God was warning Pharaoh to govern diligently so that his people wouldn't starve.

In Genesis 41 we see Pharaoh's acknowledgement of Joseph, and more importantly, his acknowledgment of Joseph's God. In Genesis 41:38-40 we read, "**38** So Pharaoh asked them, *"Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?"* **39** Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, *"Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. 40 You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."*

We can rush by this so fast that we miss the jaw-dropping drama that unfolded. Pharaoh, the most powerful man on the face of the planet, made a 14 year strategic plan based on the message Joseph conveyed from God. Pharaoh changed national economic policy by changing the taxation laws, and then, in essence, he took off his crown, and handed it to an unknown ex-con (Joseph).

Why would he do any of this? Because Pharaoh experienced the manifest presence and power of God; first in his dreams, and then in

and through Joseph. Pharaohs were typically thought of as being gods, but here, Pharaoh recognized the greatness of God.

God wants to bless the nations. When He made a covenant with Abraham, God had Egypt in mind, along with all the other nations. In Genesis 41, God blessed Pharaoh, the nation of Egypt, and all the surrounding nations, by warning them about the coming famine. God blessed the nations by sending Joseph, and in so doing, God rescued the nations from starvation.

There is a lot of evil in our world, just as there was in Joseph's day; Joseph encountered jealousy, greed, anger, and violence. And while God is both loving and sovereign, He allows us to make decisions and reap the consequences of our decisions. Is God to blame for riots, looting, and violence? Is He to blame for drunk drivers? Is He to blame for the mean-spiritedness, the competition, or the deception that can play itself out within marriages or families? Joseph wasn't abandoned by God, but his brothers dealt him an ugly hand that landed him in slavery, followed by prison.

But Joseph's story reminds us that evil does not have the last word; God does. John Walton writes, "[God] grants evil a certain latitude with a sovereign confidence that even when it does its worst, He can outflank it."<sup>1</sup> Like Joseph, when evil is done to us, we choose to bless because God can and does outflank evil.

The much maligned Joseph became the physical incarnation of God's blessing to the nations. Egypt and the surrounding nations needed wisdom, vision and leadership to survive the 7 years of famine and

God addressed their need by calling Joseph. *Joseph's calling led to Egypt's blessing.*

Joseph became both a witness to the God who blesses, as well as the incarnation of His blessing. The same can be true for us: *our calling leads to the nations' blessing.* The story of Genesis sets the stage for how God has chosen to be at work in the world. He is intimately involved in the personal affairs of individuals, families, and nations, and using us in His campaign to bless.

Joseph was absolutely critical to God's blessing; it wasn't until Joseph delivered God's interpretation that Pharaoh recognized the power of God...*God has spoken, He is among us, and I see Him and hear Him through you.*

By the time we get to Genesis 47, Egypt has been saved, Joseph has been reunited with his long-lost family, and the family patriarch (Jacob) is about to be introduced to Pharaoh for the first time. Let's read Genesis 47:1-12.

1 Joseph went and told Pharaoh, "My father and brothers, with their flocks and herds and everything they own, have come from the land of Canaan and are now in Goshen." 2 He chose five of his brothers and presented them before Pharaoh.

3 Pharaoh asked the brothers, "What is your occupation?" "Your servants are shepherds," they replied to Pharaoh, "just as our fathers were." 4 They also said to him, "We have come to live here awhile, because the famine is severe in Canaan and your servants' flocks have no pasture. So now, please let your servants settle in Goshen."

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<sup>1</sup> John Walton, *NIV Application Commentary, Genesis*, 700.

5 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you, 6 and the land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land. Let them live in Goshen. And if you know of any among them with special ability, put them in charge of my own livestock."

7 Then Joseph brought his father Jacob in and presented him before Pharaoh. After Jacob blessed Pharaoh, 8 Pharaoh asked him, "How old are you?" 9 And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers." 10 Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from his presence.

11 So Joseph settled his father and his brothers in Egypt and gave them property in the best part of the land, the district of Rameses, as Pharaoh directed. 12 Joseph also provided his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their children.

In the time remaining, I want to pick up on two words found within our text and take the time to unpack and apply each word to our present situation. The first word is **bless**, and the second word is **pilgrimage**.

1. **Bless**: So what does it mean "to bless"?

When someone sneezes, even a complete stranger, many of us will speak up and say, "**Bless you!**" Generally, what we mean is something to the effect of, "*I really hope you feel better soon...so that you will stop sneezing your disgusting germs all over me,*" or something like that.

Or suppose you drop a bag of groceries filled with cans, and the cans go rolling in very which direction. If someone were to bend down and help you gather up all your cans, you might say something like "*Bless your heart.*" What we mean is, "*Thank you for your kindness.*"

But, if we lived in the Southern United States, you can say pretty much say whatever you want to about people, as long as you end the sentence with "bless his heart." Like, "*That boy has a face only a mother could love... bless his heart.*" Or, "*That girl is so blonde she thinks the English Channel is a British T.V. station...bless her heart.*" Or, "*I swear, that boy is so clumsy he'd trip over a wireless phone...bless his heart.*"

Biblically speaking, when we speak a word of blessing, something else is going on. When we bless someone, we are asking God to look upon them with favour. In Numbers 6, God gave instructions to the priests on how they were to bless their people.

"22 The LORD said... 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: 24 'The LORD bless you and keep you; 25 the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; 26 the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.'"

May the Lord show you His favour and His love; may He surround you on every side, may He draw you into relationship with Himself, may He strengthen and protect you. May the Lord reveal Himself to you, may you see His glory, and know His delight in you. May your life always be in His focus, and may He bring you to complete wholeness: in body, in mind, and in every relationship. Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

What's interesting in this scene is that Jacob is the one doing the blessing. Typically, the greater always blesses the lesser<sup>2</sup>; it's for this reason we ask Jesus to bless us...we're the one's in need, and He's the One with all the resources.

Pharaoh had everything one could ever want materially: land, security, royalty. Jacob and his family were landless, half-starved, and completely at his mercy. And yet, when Pharaoh met Jacob, it was Pharaoh who was dependent on Jacob for blessing. On the visible plane of reality it was Jacob who had need, but on the invisible plane of reality Jacob stood as an emissary of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

All of us live with great paradox in the here and now; we live waiting for the great reversal that will come when Jesus returns. Presently, as followers of Jesus in this world, we may not be people of position, power, or influence. And yet, God chooses to pour out His blessing to the world through us. God is a blessing God, He wants to bless the world, and He has chosen to funnel His blessing to nations, cities, neighbourhoods, and businesses through us.

The world needs God's blessing. The world needs God's favour, His love, His presence, His protection, His glory, His wholeness. The world needs Jesus' blessing (whether they realize it or not), and Jesus has appointed us to be bearers of this blessing (whether we realize it or not).

The nations need God, and Jesus has appointed you. Our city needs God, and Jesus has appointed you. Your neighbourhood needs God, and Jesus has appointed you. The business or corporation you work for needs God, and Jesus has appointed you by putting you on their payroll. Jesus has appointed us, and not just appointed...the Holy Spirit has also anointed us with the power and authority of Jesus.

I said earlier that typically, blessing always flows from the greater to the lesser, but clearly this is not always the case. We regularly bless the Lord, and He is superior to us in every way. And once again, when it comes to blessing the nations, we don't bless others because we are superior; we simply point to the One who is greater, and pass on what we have received from Him. We are servants and messengers of the Great King. We testify to the greatness of His glory, His holiness, His love, His forgiveness, and His peace; we pass on what we ourselves have seen, heard, and experienced.

Who better to bless than Jacob? He had been an object of God's blessing all of his life. My dear friends, there is both a blessing and a calling over your life. In other words, there is something for you to receive, and something for you to give away. Now let's turn our attention to another important word in our text, the word "pilgrimage".

**2. Pilgrimage:** In vs. 8, Pharaoh asked Jacob how old he was and in vs. 9 Jacob responded by saying, "the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty." Pilgrimage is a brilliant word: it evokes the

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<sup>2</sup> This is not always the case. When we "bless the Lord," we do not add anything that is lacking in Himself; we simply recognize, acknowledge, and name what is already true of Him. The Lord is "blessed" by our praise in the sense that He is rightly honoured; if we neglect to praise the Scriptures remind us that the rocks and the hills will cry out (Isaiah 55:12; Luke 19:40).

image of a journey; it recognizes that life is about movement, it recognizes that there is a destination. Life and faith is about movement; there is a destination in front of us.

And it's through Jesus that we first enter this pilgrimage; there is no life apart from Him. Acts 4:12 says, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men [or women] by which we must be saved."

Whether you know it or not, God says that we all need "saving," that is, we need to be rescued from death, reconciled to God, and restored to life. The death Jesus died, He died for us, in our place. And the forgiveness He secured, He secured for you and me. We enter into relationship with God by confessing our brokenness and sin, and receiving the forgiveness Jesus offers; with our confession our pilgrimage begins.

This word "pilgrimage" reminds us that there is more to come, another life to come, a life without end. Jacob stood in front of Pharaoh without land to call his own, but he never doubted God's promise of what was coming.

**Illus:** If you have ever driven with young kids in the car, and the journey was really long (as an aside, in my experience, when driving with kids, "really long" is anything over 20 minutes), there is one question that you can be sure they will ask: *are we there yet?* When the question is asked, likely you try to remain patient because you too wish the journey was over. But likely you explain how much longer the journey will be, and how great it will be when you arrive; the anticipation of what is to come has a way of sustaining us in the waiting.

We make a mistake when we confuse this life and the life to come. To use words that every child can understand: *we aren't there yet.* The world in its present form is not our final destination; we were made for a different world, a world in which every person gladly follows the rule of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here and now we are strangers, living in a world to which we do not entirely belong. Hebrews 11:16 says, we are "*longing for a better country—a heavenly one.*" "Heaven" is the biblical word for the time when we will be with the Father forever, with nothing to hinder our enjoyment of Him or His enjoyment of us. There is a destination before us, and until the day that Jesus returns, or we die and go to be with Him, all of us are invited into a pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage is a great word because it speaks to a destination, while at the same time reminding us that there is a life to be lived right now. As Christians, we're not just sitting around waiting for heaven, we're on our feet, following wherever Jesus leads us. We are called to bear witness to and contend for a future that is not yet; in fact, Jesus invites us to live the future life in the here and now.

When Jesus came announcing the kingdom of God, He did more than just talk; His actions demonstrated the arrival of God's rule. In essence, Jesus said, "*If you want to know what the world looks like when God is ruling, watch Me and see.* As people watched Jesus, He ushered in the kingdom: bodies were healed, empty stomachs were fed, people were released from evil spirits that bound them, the dead were raised, power-hungry authorities challenged, exposed, and humbled.

Everywhere Jesus went the life of heaven sprang forth on earth; Jesus called the future life into the present. Before Jesus returned to the Father's side, He told His disciples that they would do the *same things* He had done and *even greater things*.

Friends, we're not on our own. We've been blessed by Jesus, we've been called/appointed to do the same things He did. We've been called/appointed to be channels of His blessing to the nations, and we've been anointed by the Holy Spirit with the power and authority that belongs to Jesus. We will not fail, as we put our faith in Him; we will not fail as we follow where He leads.

Friends, Jesus isn't looking for fans, He's looking for followers. One author writes, "Jesus never asked us to sit on the sidelines and cheer for his cause."<sup>3</sup> This word "pilgrimage" reminds us that the journey is about becoming an apprentice of Jesus.

One thing is certain: we are all following someone or something. Jesus' assumption was that our "pilgrimage" would be defined by apprenticeship. Dallas Willard writes, His assumption was that we "would find him so admirable in every respect--wise, beautiful, powerful, and good--that [we] would constantly seek to be in his presence and be guided, instructed, and helped by him in every aspect of [our] lives." The goal of the apprentice is to know what the Master knows, to do what the Master does, and to become what the Master is.

Friends, clearly we are not there yet...our destination is still before us, as is our pilgrimage. There are nations, and cities, and

neighbourhoods, and businesses that are in need of Jesus' blessing, but we've been appointed and anointed to pass on what we have received from Him.

**Conclusion:** This morning, I would like to speak a blessing over you and I would like to invite all of you to stand.

- Blessing
- Worship
- New Series next week: Reaching The Heart of Our City
- Invitation for prayer

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<sup>3</sup> Craig Groeschel, Sr. Pastor of LifeChurch.tv