

Dealing with the Ups & Downs of Life

Roger Frapwell, Robin Rowles, Charlane Bradley,

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Sermon Audio file

Dealing with the ups and downs of life

Gen 45: 1-10, 14-15, 24-28, 46: 1-4, 29-30, 47: 28, 49: 33, 50: 15-22

Welcome -

Celebrations - Steve's lunch for his Dad! (Pic) Matthew Perje - Junior Olympic Team for USA! (pics x 2)
Sun 27th - Chloe Chant, Grace Weir is 80
Tues 29th - Tom King
Fri 2nd - Julie Attwater, and Lois Herring

Song - Goodness of God

Song - Reckless Love

Reading by Robin & Jill - Gen 45: 1-10, 14-15, 24-28, 46: 1-4, 29-30, 47: 28, 49: 33, 50: 15-22

Intro - The last time I was at an airport was July 2017... I stood waiting at Heathrow for my daughter to come in from Australia... as I looked about there were other couples and families being reunited with their loved ones. It was lovely to see. Then it was my turn as Gemma appeared... tired but wearing a beaming smile before collapsing into my arms for an enormous hug! It is not an exaggeration to say that relationships are the most important thing in life. The two greatest commandments in the Bible are to do with right relationships - first toward God and then toward one another. Whenever we see broken relationships toward God or in the family or in the Church, we know that it is not pleasing to God. He is in the business of reconciling broken relationships.

It's powerful and emotional to witness a fractured family being reconciled and reunited. That's why Genesis 45 is such a moving chapter. We are allowed to look in on the reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers after 22 years of separation and estrangement. The key to reconciliation is our attitude and the key to our attitude is submitting ourselves completely to God and His sovereignty. "God has given to us "the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5: 18 19).

Understand what God is like - Rollercoaster ride must've seemed worth it when Joseph suddenly chooses to reveal himself to his brothers. They are stunned, petrified, knowing their guilt and what their deeds deserved. They also knew that they were now stood in the presence of the one who could end their life at the click of his fingers. The word translated "terrified" (45: 3) is used to describe the feeling which swept over a group of men in battle when suddenly the enemy turned on them and they realized they were doomed. How would we have felt...? Suddenly having to give account...? We will... Joseph

oozes grace, "Come close to me..." (45: 4) They can't believe it. They are receiving what they do not deserve and could never earn = grace. Picture of you and me before God... download last week!!

Joseph then explains how what they intended for bad God has turned around for good. "... but God" = the two words that make all the difference. Apply to ourselves... life going nowhere, "but God" God sent me here, God arranged it all, God is working out His purpose. Do we choose to see God in our own situation...? When tempted to ask God what's going wrong, or to blame him for our circumstances, choose to see God, and ask Him what it is that we are to discover through this? God had worked in Joseph through his various situations, and He can work in us too. That's NOT to mean that God 'makes' bad things happen to Joseph, or that he 'makes' bad things happen to us - God is NOT a sadist... BUT GOD (there's those 2 words again) can USE ANY situation to bring about His greater purposes - even in us! Joseph not only forgives them, he invites them to join him so they might be further blessed. He does this because of the change of heart he has witnessed in his brothers - but it has taken time! Therefore he sees God in this too. How long did it take for you to bow the knee to God, or to see Him in your situation?

Story climaxes in the reunion between Joseph and his father Jacob, after 25 years apart (46: 29). Joy. Tears. Celebration similar to that recorded of the Prodigal son in Luke 15, but here was no Prodigal... Have you ever experienced that joy of reunion. Maybe a child has been away, or you haven't seen a parent for a while...? Covid!! Many of us will remember how excited we were to first see another person again!

Seem too good to be true...? Brothers still felt that - especially when Jacob dies 17 years later. Immediately guilt rears its ugly head as the brothers think Joseph will now seek revenge. Couldn't accept God's amazing grace - they had been forgiven, but they themselves had not forgotten - you...??? "There is no condemnation in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8: 1). Remember the picture last week of the dustbin at the foot of the Cross! Remember us exploring the issue of guilt the week before? Remember the message from Paul Ellis on choosing to forgive? ALL these build up the repetitive themes of God's amazing grace!!!

Keep on your guard - We haven't yet arrived. Even after all the blessings Joseph's brothers received, extra food, additional material possessions, their having proved they have changed and softened, Joseph knows they are not the finished article. As they leave to bring back their father, he adds a throw-away comment, "Don't quarrel on the way!" (Gen 45: 24) It was no more than a week's journey, they had more now than ever before... Why did he say that...? Because although Joseph now trusts his brothers he will not trust human nature. Old habits die hard. People do change, but patterns of behaviour rarely change without a struggle... The word, 'quarrel' => to be agitated or perturbed, => how people are before a fight breaks out. Maybe they still want to blame one another...? Maybe they are annoyed that Benjamin is being favoured...? Maybe Joseph just knew there was always the potential for one of them to blow!! Remember certain kids at school always getting into trouble?! I often wonder where those guys are now!! WE all need this reminder. We are on a journey, God has blessed us, and is blessing us, we have so much to be grateful for, yet without any effort at all we can still find things that are not right - or as we would like. Maybe we can hear the Lord speaking to us through Joseph...? "Don't quarrel on the way!"

Maybe you have strong views surrounding the ongoing challenge of Covid and whose voice we should be listening to? Some of you are desperate to sing. Some of you are desperate to meet up. Some of you are fearful of either or both. Whatever our individual viewpoint, each that can no doubt be supported either scientifically, medically or economically, "Don't quarrel on the way!" Rather, Jesus says, "This is my command: Love one another" (John 15: 17)

Testimony & Song 'Peace be still' by Charlane

Prayers led by Charlane

Community Kids Video from Clare

Involve God in everything - One of the most noticeable characteristics of Joseph throughout these chapters is the centrality of God in his life. So often, even for Christians, God is a part of our lives, but He's not at the centre. He is a 'spoke' in the wheel of life, but He's not the 'hub'. But for Joseph, everything centred on God... When Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph, he immediately thought of God. "How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" (39: 9). When he was in the dungeon and the cupbearer and baker had their

dreams, Joseph's response was, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" (40: 8). When he was called before Pharaoh, who said, "I hear you can interpret dreams," Joseph said, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favourable answer." (41: 16). And in giving Pharaoh the interpretation, Joseph used God's name four times to underscore to Pharaoh that it was God who was telling Pharaoh what was about to happen (41: 25, 28, 32).

When Joseph's wife bore him two sons, he gave them names which bore witness to God's faithfulness. He named the first Manasseh, saying, "God has made me forget all my trouble ..." and he named the second Ephraim, saying, "God has made me fruitful ..." (41: 51, 52). When Joseph's brothers came to buy grain, even though Joseph wanted to disguise himself from them, he could not hide his relationship with God. He told them, "Do this and live, for I fear God" (42: 18). When they returned with Benjamin, Joseph, still disguising himself, said to his brother, "May God be gracious to you, my son" (43: 29). Joseph's steward had told the worried brothers concerning the money returned to their sacks, "Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks" (43: 23). Obviously, Joseph had told the steward to say that. At the end of Genesis, when Joseph's brothers feared that he would pay them back now that their father was dead, he replied, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (50:19, 20). Just before his death, Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you, and

bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (50:24, 25).

From the first to the last, God was at the centre of Joseph's life and at the forefront of his mind. Where is God in ours - and would that be what others say of us...?

Prepare to face Death positively - Now, this is urgent and relevant to every single person in the room, because there is a 100 per cent mortality rate in the human race. Every single one of us is going to die. Listen, you are closer to death at this moment than you ever have been!! I don't think our culture does death well. We don't tend to think about it, even in the Church. In fact when there was opportunity to attend something called a 'Death Café' hosted by Churches Together I was the only person from the Church who attended. It was run again locally, I promoted it, and again I was the only one from here to attend, despite saying that I felt it was something each person should consider. Clearly, you lot all felt differently!

The Bible speaks openly about death, and Jacob does here especially, and certainly with no 'woe is me' about it. For example, Genesis 45: 28 (this is when the brothers come back from Egypt, they tell him that Joseph is alive), this is what it says. "And Israel [that's Jacob] said, 'It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.'" Death is right on the horizon for him in his mindset.

Then in chapter 46, when Joseph and Jacob are finally reunited, they embrace each other and weep on each other for "a good while," the text says, and then in verse 30 (Genesis 46: 30), "Jacob said to Joseph, 'Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive.'" Then again at the end of chapter 47 Jacob gives Joseph very specific instructions about his burial and what's to take place after he dies. Then, in chapters 48-49, you have two full chapters that are essentially Jacob addressing his children and his grandchildren before his impending death. There is a lot of space that's taken up here with Jacob's dying thoughts and dying words. We need to know how to prepare for our own death, we need to know how to deal with death when it happens in our families, and we need to know whether there's hope and where that hope is found, so that alongside the

natural and understandable pain and grief associated with death we can also embrace this positively.

Christians of other generations talked about death a lot. They wrote whole books on it. For example, Thomas á Kempis, a pre-Reformation Catholic mystic said, "Happy is he that always hath the hour of his death before his eyes and daily prepareth himself to die." Jonathan Edwards, massively used of God, wrote 70 resolutions about his own death when he was a young man, one of them being, "Resolved to think much on all occasions of my own dying and of the common circumstances which attend death." We just don't think like that! Jacob says, "My years have been few and difficult." Now, he's 130 years old here, so his years certainly don't seem few; he lives for another 17 and dies at the very ripe old age of 147. By

the way, there are non-biblical sources from the ancient world that also record extreme old ages for people at that time, so this is not implausible at all. The point is, even though he was way older than we're going to be, he saw his years on earth as just a dot, which in the context of eternity they are - so we might as well think about, and be ready for death, right now as well as for what's beyond!

Somebody once said, "When I was a child, I laughed and wept; Time crept. When as a youth I dreamed and talked, Time walked. When I became a full-grown man, Time ran. When older still I grew, Time flew. Soon I shall find in passing on, Time gone." Your life is brief. Scripture describes it as a vapor, as a mist that quickly disappears (James 4). It appears for a little time, and then vanishes. Given the brevity of life we each ought to prepare for our own death. What about writing your own testimony of your life, and doing so in such a way that speaks of the faithfulness of your God? So this is what you are passing on to others who might read it.

Jacob had important things to say to his own children whilst he was still alive. And whilst not everything was positive that he was saying, the fact is that he made sure he'd said all that he'd wanted to say. Don't live with the regret of never having said what you wished you had, especially to your children & wider family. Thinking practically, demonstrate you have an eternal perspective by leaving a legacy to God's work in your will. Many people don't even make a will, which shows they never think about the future, or that death just won't happen to them, or if it does then so be it. EVERY Christian should think ahead, and for many of you the opportunity you have to impact eternity most with your finances is when you die! If you haven't yet made a will, I would urge you to consider making one this week. If you have made a will but not included any element of what you leave behind going towards God's work, ie a Christian Charity or the Church here, then I would urge you to consider changing your will this week. We say that eternal issues matter. To not reflect this is in our will is therefore a contradiction, if not an oversight. What about when a loved one dies? First of all, don't be ashamed to grieve. Genesis 50: 1, "Joseph fell on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him." Joseph was broken. Devastated, even though for him he knew it was coming. That's ok and to be expected, and there is no shame in outward emotion either. Grieving has no end date on it. For some you may always feel a sense of loss... BUT... choose to carry on with life. Genesis 50: 14, "After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father." Regardless of what we might still 'feel' we do need to live again. As we do so, hold on to hope.

In Acts 2 in Peter's sermon he tells us that when Jesus died that the grave could not hold him. The grave couldn't hold him. He conquered it, he triumphed over it. Therefore, because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are able to have hope. We have hope that death is not the end, we have hope that there is resurrection that is certain for the Christian, we have hope that even in our death, even when we face death ourselves, if we face it in Jesus, we face it as those who will be welcomed with open arms into the loving embrace of our Saviour.

And THAT is the number 1 reason why we should face our own death so positively.

"For me to live is Christ, but to die is... gain!" (Phil 1: 21).

Song - Amazing Grace

Song - Great is the Lord (and most worthy of praise)

Conclusion - The Bible teaches that, at the heart of the universe there is a Creator who is both fair and purposeful, who has established links between actions and consequences. So what do you do when it doesn't work out that way? Asaph is the God-inspired writer of Ps. 73 and he is really struggling over this very thing. In v.2 he says, "But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped." In other words, "Judging from appearances, God doesn't enforce justice evenly, and frankly, that is causing me to lose my spiritual balance and feel pretty miffed about it!" How easy it would have been for Joseph to let anger become bitterness, to let temptation lead to immorality, to let his fear foster despair, to let suffering turn to self-pity. Joseph had ample ammunition and power with which to formulate a spectacular revenge against his ruthless brothers, should the opportunity ever present

itself. But through it all, he stayed steady, exhibited a gentle, forgiving spirit, and allowed God to work in him and through him.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, a wise preacher of a past generation, made these observations from Joseph's example: "To see God in all things, both good and evil, enables us to forgive easily those who injure us. It does not incline us to condone their fault as if they were unconscious instruments... for they act as freely as if God had no part at all. But we can forgive, and pray for them... for they are the unwitting benefactors to our souls. This is strongly exemplified in Joseph, for he saw the hand of God overruling the designs of his brothers; and from that consideration, he not only readily forgave them but entreated them 'not to be grieved,' since whatever had been their intentions, God had used their misdeeds to accomplish His own gracious purposes."

Pastor Lloyd Stillely states, "What this world needs to see are real Christians who stand out in the crowd because they simply believe God. Life is not always fair, but God is always good. Circumstances out of our control will come our way, but God is always sovereign. Let today be the day of relief and release. Time to stop carrying your wounds and let Him who was wounded for you take them."

Song - It is well (with my soul)

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