

Genesis 46:1-7 - All in for God

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[0:00] So that's Genesis chapter 46 verses 1 to 7. So Israel set out with all that was his.! And when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.
And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, Jacob, Jacob, here I am, he replied. I am God, the God of your father, he said.
Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again.
And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes. Then Jacob left Beersheba, and Israel's son took their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the carts that Pharaoh had sent to transport them.
So Jacob and all his offspring went to Egypt. Taking with them their livestock and their possessions they had acquired in Canaan. Jacob brought with him to Egypt his sons and grandsons and his daughters and granddaughters, all his offspring.

[1:11] Amen. Great. Please do keep the passage open in front of you. We're going to go a little bit either side of it as well to explore what's happening. But why don't we pray? Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word.
Father, we thank you that it's Sunday. We thank you that it's a day when we can gather as your people. We can have your word open in front of us, and your spirit who inspired this word is the same spirit who will now speak and enable us to understand.
So please equip us, help us to listen, and would you teach us great things in Jesus' name. Amen. Grace, we're dropping into a story.
I realize this is slightly random for you. We're dropping into a story of this man, Jacob. And you may say, well, how could this possibly be relevant? I actually think this is hugely relevant.
And the reason is largely because what we were just talking about with the children. I think one of the challenges of being human is learning to grow older. And learning to grow older and cope with the disappointing realities of life.

[2:21] I don't know this morning whether you find life disappointing, but I imagine at some point you will. I think when we're young, and some of you, I appreciate, are young.
When we're young, we have huge expectation and huge dreams and ambitions and hopes. And many of us, we look forward to our lives and we think of all that we might do and all the things we'd love to achieve and all the things we'd love to have.
But one of the problems of growing older is learning to cope with the disappointment when those things don't happen. The mismatched expectation and reality.
And I think that's what's really true in the life of Jacob. See, Jacob is an interesting character. Just, okay, a very brief kind of summary of the whole book of Genesis.
The book of Genesis is structured around a little phrase that comes up 10 times. If you go back to chapter 37 and verse 1, you'll see it.

[3 : 26] Actually, verse 2. This is the account of Jacob's family line. 10 times in the book of Genesis, you get that phrase. This is the account of, and then you get a family line.

The first one is, back in Genesis 2, this is the account of the heavens and the earth. And Genesis is based on these accounts of different stories, different families.

And you go from Adam and to Noah and to Abraham. Not all the big characters. Abraham, Isaac. And the final one is Jacob. Jacob is the last big character of the book of Genesis.

Which is odd, because most of Genesis 37 to 45 is about Joseph, not Jacob. But you've got to remember, actually, it's not about Joseph.

It's all about Jacob. It's about God's promises to Jacob. So let's just think of Jacob for a second. Jacob, when he was a young man, was dubious.

[4 : 25] He was a trickster. He was a liar. He was a deceiver. He stole the blessing from his older brother. He deceived his father.

Jacob was a, he liked to make things happen. And Jacob, all the time, was trying to get the blessing, the blessing that God had promised to Abraham and to Isaac.

Jacob was trying to get that blessing for himself. Now, alongside that, God also made promises to Jacob that it would be him. God met with Jacob several times and said to him, I am the God of your father, Abraham and Isaac, and I will give you the blessing.

And I will give you this land. And I will give you offspring. But Jacob was trying to grab it for himself. He was trying to grasp it, rather than wait to be given it.

And so Jacob's running around trying to fix things, trying to sort things out. And Jacob ends up with these 12 sons. And he has a favorite son, Joseph.

[5 : 33] And it causes great distress in his family. And his family, his sons are ripped apart by jealousy. Until eventually, the brothers decide to try and get rid of Joseph. And I want you to listen to what Jacob says.

I want you to follow through Jacob's experience. Young man, I'm going to get it. I can do it. I can fix everything. I can grab the blessing for myself. Hear how he is now as an older man. This is what he says.

Don't worry about turning to it. He's told that his son Joseph has been ripped apart by wild animals. That isn't true, but it's what he's been told. And Jacob says, he refuses to be comforted.

I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave. Do you feel the pain? And then a bit later on, he says very similar things as he experiences the sorrow of all that's happened.

And he says to the brothers, when they go back down to Egypt to get food, he says to them, look at all that's happened to me.

[6 : 43] All that's gone wrong. And eventually he says this very powerful line when he says, if I'm bereaved, then I'm bereaved. You can sense the disappointment, right?

Here's the man who was so obsessed with the blessing of God, who God had promised blessing to. And he's like, I'm going to be the blessing. I'm trying to grab it for myself. All of that's been shattered.

Been shattered by the brutal realities of life. And now he's, if I'm bereaved, I'm bereaved. My gray head will go down to the grave and sorry.

It's a sad story. But what happens in chapter 46 is that Jacob is restored. This is why this is so beautiful. So if you're someone who knows anything of that disappointment, that this is how to find restoration in a world of disappointment.

Well, you could call this sermon, how to die well. But that's a bit bleak. But that's really what's happening. Genesis 46 through to 50 is really about how Jacob is able to die in faith.

[7:58] It's very beautiful. So let's back up. I'm going to show you five things that happened that turned Jacob's experience around. And I hope that these things will resonate with you and be an encouragement to you.

We're just going to dip back into chapter 45. So if you've got your Bibles open, please have this open. I've got nothing on the screen. So I apologize. I'm not as good as Steve. Here is the first thing.

The first thing that changes is that Jacob receives news of a resurrection. Okay, so here he is. In Canaan, this land, he sent his brothers, the 11 remaining brothers, down to Egypt to try and get food in the famine that they're in.

And while they're in Egypt, they meet Joseph. Joseph's not dead. He's been raised up. So this is what we read.

Let's go from verse 25. So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. They told him, Joseph is still alive.

[9:05] In fact, he is the ruler of all Egypt. Jacob was stunned. He did not believe them. But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.

And Israel said, I'm convinced my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die. Jacob has lived for 20 years, 25, however long, a long time.

Jacob has lived with this painful reality that his favorite precious son Joseph is dead. And suddenly he's told, actually, he's alive.

Resurrection. That's the hope. And what is Jacob's response? Please stick with this. Look at it. What is Jacob's response when he hears news of a resurrection?

What is his first response? Doesn't believe it. He doesn't believe it can be true. Jacob was stunned. He did not believe them.

[10:14] In fact, this is interesting. That word stunned in the original, apparently it literally means his heart stopped. His heart stopped. It's as if he sort of dies.

He can't believe the message that he's being told. He can't believe that his son who was dead is alive again. He can't understand it. And the brothers give Jacob the evidence.

They tell him the things that Joseph had said. And they show him the carts. They bought all these carts from Egypt with good things on them. And then you get this beautiful phrase.

When he saw these things, the spirit of their father, Jacob, revived. So the one whose heart stopped is now revived by the news of a resurrection.

This is what turns Jacob's world around. It's a message he can hardly dare to believe. And yet this is the reality he's now confronted with.

[11:22] And he says, Israel is Jacob, by the way, the same person. I'm convinced my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die. Now, I don't think it takes a genius to realize that this has parallels to the news of another resurrection.

Another resurrection that was proclaimed on the first Easter Sunday morning. While it was still dark, the women went to the tomb and they saw the stone had been rolled away.

And going in, they saw that the body was not there. And they came to the first disciples and they said, he's alive.

And the disciples couldn't believe that. You see, to believe in resurrection in a world of death is so hard for us. It's so against all that we understand about this world.

Everything in our world is heading towards death. That is why growing old is so hard. That is why our world is disappointing. Because everything is dying. You understand that?

[12:25] Everything in our world is dying. That's why we find it so painful. Because even the good things we enjoy, we know they don't last. Everything is heading towards death.

So like, even the smallest little things that we enjoy, they're great, but they don't last. They're gone too soon. You know, that bowl of Haagen-Dazs ice cream, which I love so much.

It's like, oh, this is so good. I love it. Oh, it's gone. And that disappointment in life is because everything heads towards death. And what turns everything around is when you are confronted with news of a resurrection.

A resurrected son. A favored son who was dead and now is alive again. The message of resurrection, the message that Jesus rose from the dead, is our gospel.

He's alive. He's alive. And because Jesus went from death to life, that changes everything.

[13:34] We're so used to living in a world that goes from life to death, life to death. But Jesus turns it around, reverses the curse and goes from death to life.

And if you can understand the fact that Jesus is raised from the dead, it will begin to revive your soul. In a world of disappointment, it is the resurrection that will give you hope.

And the danger is that what we do when we're faced with disappointment is we look for something else. We say, well, perhaps this will give me hope. But it will just lead to further disappointment because you're putting your hope in something that's still dying.

Everything in our world is dying. And if you hope in dying things, then you will be disappointed. But if you can hope in the living one, then you will have a hope that lasts forever.

So where we find ourselves disappointed, we need to hear the news of the resurrected son. We need to remind ourselves again. We need to hear again that the tomb was empty, that Jesus is raised, that death has been defeated, that darkness has been driven out, and that light has won.

[14:43] That's our hope. And Jacob says, I'm convinced. He's alive. So there it is.

As the news of the resurrection, here's the second thing. That was the longest. We're going to go faster. Here's the second thing that takes Jacob from a place of disappointment to joy. The second thing is rekindled worship.

Look what he does as he sets out in chapter 46, verse 1. So Israel, that's Jacob, set out with all that was his. And when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father, Isaac.

He offered sacrifices. He worshipped. One of the striking things is that ever since Joseph was sold into Egypt and the betrayal, there's no evidence that Jacob worshipped.

There's no evidence that Jacob offered any sacrifices. And yet here he is, back in the place of worship. And notice he's back in Beersheba.

[15:47] This is where his father Isaac had worshipped. And so he's reconnecting, he's rekindling a worship that goes back through the generations. Beersheba is the very southernmost point of Israel.

This is as he makes his journey down to Egypt to go and visit Joseph in Egypt. He's about to leave the promised land. This is the point at which he leaves the promised land of Canaan.

And so he offers this act of worship. And I want to say to us, in our disappointment and in our struggle and in our confusion, in our pain, is it possible that we forget to worship?

Is it possible that we forget to lift our eyes and our hearts to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of the generations, the God who's been faithful through countless generations? Some of you have grown up in homes where God has been worshipped.

Some of you have generations of worship in your families. We need to remember that we're not isolated individuals who are trying to do our little bit of worship here on our own.

[16:59] We're connected to a great long story, a great history of worshippers. Abraham. You worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And yet how quickly we become consumed with the things that are happening around us.

How quickly we lose sight of the God who truly is above. So I wonder today whether God is saying to you, will you rekindle your worship?

Will you act in worship again? Will you offer sacrifices? Offer a sacrifice of worship, a sacrifice of praise. Offer yourself as a sacrifice to God.

And say, I want to worship you. I want to be a worshipper. I have forgotten to be a worshipper. So as you hear the news of this resurrected son, it rekindles within you a worship.

An ancient worship. Not some new fangled novel thing, but a deep ancient historical worship of our God.

[18:05] And as worship is rekindled, I want you to notice that it's in that moment that God speaks. God has not spoken through the entire narrative of Joseph.

God has not spoken audibly in this way to any of the brothers, to anything that's happened. But it's at this moment, when Jacob is at this crisis point, that God speaks.

And here's the third thing. There is a reconnection with the promise. There's news of this resurrection. There's a rekindling of worship. Then there's a reconnection with the promise of God.

God suddenly speaks. I love this. Jacob. Jacob. Here I am. Isn't it incredible?

Just stop, right? Just for a second. The creator God of the whole universe calls this one individual by name. And it's not the only time. This is echoing Abraham.

[19:12] Abraham. In Genesis 22, when Abraham's about to sacrifice his son Isaac. And God says, Abraham, Abraham, here I am. Perhaps even more poignantly, it echoes Mary.

Mary. God calls to us. Calls us by name to reconnect with the promise.

God is speaking. He has spoken. And he says again to Jacob. Listen to this. I am God. The God of your forefather. The answer to our solutions.

The answer to our problems is not an understanding of all of the answers to our questions. Instead is a re-clarification of who God is. I am God.

The God of your father. And then he offers Jacob this extraordinary promise. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt. For I will make you into a great nation there.

[20:16] I will go down to Egypt with you. And I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes. This is slightly weird.

Right? Jacob is on his way down to Egypt to meet Joseph. Egypt, by any stretch of the imagination, if you know anything about the Bible, is bad news.

Abraham went to Egypt. That ended badly. Isaac was told, don't go to Egypt. Again and again, don't go to Egypt. But here is Jacob being told, no, do go to Egypt.

And I will make you a great nation there. Here is the heart of God's covenant promise. God's covenant promise is not about the stuff that he will give you. It is about his presence to be with you.

I will be with you. Jacob, as you go to Egypt, I'm not abandoning you. Don't think that I'm constrained to one little bit of the world. Instead, I will go with you.

[21:16] And I will make you into a great nation in Egypt. Even in Egypt. Jacob, don't panic. Don't fear.

There is a bigger story going on. And I am faithful to that story. And I am faithful to that story. God had already told Abraham that they were going to go to Egypt.

Do you know how long they're going to be in Egypt for? 400 years. This is the moment at which they leave the promised land.

They go down to Egypt. God has already told Abraham, your people will be slaves for 400 years in Egypt. And then I will bring you back. 400 years.

400 years ago was 1625. Can you imagine being given promises that were about 400 years time?

[22:22] It just reminds us that God's timescale is not the same as ours. We want everything to happen now. Now, now, now. But God says, no, no. I will take you down to Egypt. I will make you into a great nation. Then when the time comes, I will bring you back up out of Egypt.

And I will give you this land. It is a promise to Jacob that the great covenant that God made with Abraham has not failed.

The covenant still stands. And Jacob needs to reconnect and commit and find himself completely secure within that covenant promise of God.

God says, don't forget the covenant that I've made with you. And then there's this beautiful touch.

And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes. Jacob, you're going to die in Egypt. I will bring the nation back, but you are going to die in Egypt.

[23:23] But here is my promise to you. Your own son, Joseph, his hands will close your eyes. You will have comfort in death.

This is how to die well, to die trusting the promises of God, to die not panicking, not trying to fight, but to die knowing God's purposes are being fulfilled.

Jacob is part of a story that's bigger than him. Jacob is part of a narrative that will outlast him. Suddenly, the disappointments and the frustrations of this world are put in their place as they're reconnected to the great covenant promise of God.

Look, please let me say this. This doesn't mean that our struggles and our disappointments and our pain don't matter. They do. But they're not the big story. There is a greater story.

There is a greater promise. A greater covenant. A greater covenant that came all the way through to Jesus who said, this blood is the new covenant in my blood.

[24:34] Jesus is the one who's bringing this great covenant story. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, all the way through to Jesus. And we take up our little part in that great story.

We need to be reconnected to the promises of God that help us to put our lives into perspective. This is not all there is. There's a way greater story.

And one day, if Jesus doesn't come first, someone will close my eyes in death. But the story is bigger than that.

See, here's the fourth thing. News of a resurrection, which rekindles worship, reconnects to the great promise of God. The fourth thing is an all in obedience.

I want you to notice. Then Jacob left Beersheba and Israel's sons took their father, Jacob, and their children and their wives in the carts that Pharaoh had sent to transport him. So Jacob and all his offspring went to Egypt, taking with them their livestock and their possessions they'd acquired in Canaan.

[25 : 39] Jacob brought with him to Egypt his sons, grandsons and his daughters and granddaughters, all his offspring. Old people don't like moving.

It's generally my experience of life. Old people, seems to me, once they're settled in a place, like, no, that's it, I'll die here. It is a remarkable thing.

At this point, Jacob is older than anybody you know. He's at least 140 years old at this point in the story. And he's settled in Canaan and he's got a nice life and he's got a family and he's got some staff.

And God says, I want you to go to Egypt. And you notice that Jacob takes everything with him. He trusts God's word.

There is an all in obedience. He doesn't leave some of his family in Canaan. He doesn't leave some of his possessions. He knows he's not going back. It's very moving.

[26 : 46] He leaves this place of promise to go to Egypt. This is all in obedience. This isn't a man who's sitting on the fence with a foot in both camps.

This isn't a man who's trying to deceive and trick his way to what's most advantageous for him. This is a man who says, I'm all in. What else have I got? I'm all in.

And in a world where things often feel disappointing and often feel frustrating, you know what? Often what God is calling us to is not a half-hearted kind of, oh, fine, I'll try a little bit.

What God is calling us to is, he says, look, the world is so disappointing. The world will fail you. It's a dying world that can at best give you a brief moment of joy.

And what God is calling us to do is to say, why choose that? When all in obedience with God is what will lead to lasting, eternal joy.

[27 : 55] Jacob holds nothing back. Jacob's going to use the old years of his life, the final years of his life, to be all in for God. God, what do you want me to do?

How do you want me to live? How do you want me to bless the future generations? And maybe that's a challenge for some, I'm sure it's a challenge for all of us sitting here today, right?

How are we going to be all in in our obedience of God? I think when we're young, we can tend to be quite all in, you know?

Yeah, Jesus, I'll do anything for you. Yeah, I'm going to change the world. I'm going to be amazing. I'm going to be awesome. I'm going to do incredible things for you. And then you get a bit jaded, a bit old, and a bit disappointed, and you settle down.

And you go, okay, I'll just be mediocrity. That's fine. Is that you? It's been interesting watching my mum and dad get old.

[28 : 55] I love my mum and dad very much, and they've been a great example to me. My mum and dad were really good parents. They did a good job, largely speaking.

And they pointed us to Jesus, and they read the Bible with us, and they taught us about Jesus. I don't think I look back on my mum and dad as kind of like crazy, all-out-for-Jesus kind of Christians.

My dad was a school teacher. They were faithful, right? They were great. Here's what I think is the most cool thing about my mum and dad. They are more excited about Jesus now than they have ever been in their life.

When they came up to retirement, they took retirement, and they were like, well, we're not dead. What should we do? They went to Uganda for two years.

Because there were some churches that they could go and serve. They didn't need any support. They got plenty. You know, they had the money they needed. They could just go. So they moved to Uganda for two years.

[29 : 59] It was a massive cost. It was really hard. They were like, we want to do something. We want to do something. And I've got to say, as a dad, with my children, one of the greatest things for my children to see was old people.

They were saying, come on, we could do something. Let's do something. Let's not just sit around and wait to die. Let's do something. Let's think about how we could use our retirement.

Let's think about how we could use our lives. And here's Jacob saying, okay, I'll go to Egypt. If that's where you tell me to go, I'll go.

Now, I'm not saying that everybody should move to Egypt or everybody should move to Uganda. I think for all of us, what would it look like to be all in? What would it look like to hold nothing back?

What would it look like to say, right, that's it. I'm placing all... Oh, no. Betting analogies are bad, aren't they? I'm putting all my chips on Jesus. You know, I'm putting everything on Jesus. I'm banking everything on him.

[31 : 05] And holding nothing back. That's Jacob. He's been a terrible dad and a terrible man up until this point.

But at last, at this point, he's going to live in obedience. Which brings us to one final thing. Well done. Is everyone all right? Everyone happy? One final thing. The news of the resurrection leads to rekindled worship, a reconnection with the promise, and all in obedience.

And then you get this list of names, which I didn't ask Jen to read. Because I thought that would be unkind. But it is very important.

There's a list of 70 names. And all of them are Jacob's descendants. You see, what begins to become very clear is that the offspring are what matter.

The future of the promise, the future of the world depends on these offspring. And so Jacob becomes consumed with his offspring being the family of the blessing who will bring God's blessing to the world.

[32 : 14] And so we get the names of them all listed here. Names of the people who are the direct descendants of Jacob. Because remember, Abraham to Isaac to Jacob, now to the 12 tribes of Jacob, now on to the sons and the daughters of them.

You see, now the nation is growing and there's 70 of them. It's a direct parallel, I think, to Genesis 10 where you get a list of 70 nations.

And what we're being told is that the hope for the 70 nations is the people of God. The only hope for our world is the people of God, the people of the promise.

How is God going to reach the world? How is God going to bring blessing to the world? Through the offspring of Jacob. Here they are. It's through the offspring of Jacob that God will continue the story and continue it all the way through down to Jesus.

The great offspring, the seed through whom God brings blessing to the world. And so the story is not about Jacob.

[33 : 26] It's about the bigger thing that God is doing. And as we finish this morning, I want to ask that God would rekindle in us a confidence, the joy in what he is doing beyond us.

Bigger than us. Bigger than us. Bigger than us. That we would play our tiny part in God's great plan. So here's my final question for you. If you had a choice, would you rather be a really big part of something small or a small part of something massive?

Because we live in a culture that says the most important thing is be a big part. Be the main character. Be the main energy. Be the big thing that's going on.

Make sure you've got everything you need. Make sure everything's about you. Make sure that your name is known. Make sure you've got a legacy. Make sure everything's in place. Make sure you're impressive. And we want to be a big part. But reality is we're a big part of something tiny.

And God says, no, no, no. I want you to be a tiny part. One name in a list of billions. A tiny part of something massive. If you live your lives trying to be a big part of something small, then you will be disappointed.

[34:58] Because it will never give you the joy that you long for. It will never last. But if you can instead can see that God is calling you to be a tiny part of something massive, something eternal, something glorious, something that goes on forever and ever, something that will last beyond you, something that is about offspring and generations that will fall down and worship.

I'm so glad we sang that song, a thousand generations falling down in worship. That's right. A thousand generations falling down in worship to worship Jesus.

The son who was dead but is alive again. So there we go. Why don't we pray that we would know God transforming us as he did for Jacob, meeting us in our disappointments and finding hope in him.

Shall I pray? Heavenly Father, we ask this morning that you would please help us to see you as you truly are. Father, we confess that we live in a world which often is disappointing.

And we ask that you would refresh us and renew us. And that you give us hope. Father, thank you that Jesus is risen. Thank you that your promise is true.

[36:15] And thank you that the generations of offspring that will worship you will go on forever. Lord, we want to give our lives for this. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.