

Genesis (2011) 47B

- Jacob and Pharaoh stand face to face at the beginning of Chapter 47
 - The most powerful world political leader and the world's pre-eminent patriarch united for a time by the will and hand of God
 - For now the two are allies
 - Each has need for the other
 - Pharaoh wants to keep Joseph close by and he likes the idea of more Semites shoring up his power
 - Jacob needs a place to wait out the famine and beyond, and staying in Pharaoh's good graces is key to his family's prosperity
 - Or so it would seem at this moment
 - The Lord has already laid out the plan to Jacob's forefathers
 - Israel goes into Egypt for a time, to protect the people from themselves
 - They incubate in a foreign land where they will be isolated, set apart and prevented from intermarriage
 - And when the time is right, they will be brought back into the land, in keeping with God's promises
 - If you want to learn that story, listen to the Exodus study
 - But for now, the two powerful men engage in a moment of political dance, testing each other to know whether they can coexist
 - Last week, we saw Jacob bless Pharaoh
 - And we noted this was a reversal of what the world would have expected in that moment
 - Since the lessor is always blessed by the greater, the audience in Pharaoh's court would have expected the king to bless Jacob
 - But we know Jacob knew he was the greater spiritually, so he took it upon himself to bless Pharaoh

- Pharaoh is no doubt surprised by Jacob's assumption of a higher position, so he takes the conversation in a new direction

[Gen. 47:8](#) Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many years have you lived?"

[Gen. 47:9](#) 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."

[Gen. 47:10](#) And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from his presence.

[Gen. 47:11](#) So Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had ordered.

[Gen. 47:12](#) Joseph provided his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food, according to their little ones.

- Pharaoh's next question to Jacob sounds a bit odd for our day
 - We don't expect someone to ask our age, especially in a first-time meeting
 - But in ancient times, age mattered in a different way
 - It was a badge of honor and authority
 - The older was always honored above the younger
 - Therefore, Pharaoh's question is an attempt to assess Jacob's honor and make sense of Jacob's decision to bless Pharaoh
 - Jacob responds with an equally odd answer
 - First he answers the question directly: Jacob is 130 years old
 - Jacob adds that his years have been few and unpleasant, nor have they equalled the years of his fathers
 - As we said last week, Jacob will live another 17 years in Egypt, so he's not exactly on death's doorstep
 - Nevertheless, his statement seems to acknowledge that he expects that his life will not extend as long as his forefathers
 - Remember that Abraham was 125 when he fathered Isaac
 - And Isaac lived to 180
- And beyond the length of his life, Jacob says his years have been unpleasant

- The Hebrew word for unpleasant is *ra*, which is the common word for evil
 - Jacob could have meant that his years were hard and difficult
 - He has struggled his whole life – even in the womb he struggled with his brother
 - He schemed unnecessarily to receive his blessing
 - Fled the family and never saw his mother again
 - Worked as an indentured servant for Laban for 20 years while suffering betrayal at his hands
 - Suffered the indignation of his sons' shameful conduct in Canaan
 - Suffered the loss of his wife, and the loss of his favored son
 - By contrast, Jacob's father and grandfather received the promised land, were blessed with much wealth and a life of few cares
 - They both were able to live out their years in Canaan and die there in peace
 - While Jacob has spent many years outside the promised land, on the run and afraid, and now he will die in Egypt
 - So it could indeed be said that Jacob had an unpleasant life compared to his fathers
- But the word *ra* could be a reference to his own behavior – a life marked so much by sinful disobedience
 - Because we know Jacob brought so much of his hardships upon himself
 - Scripture testifies that Jacob's life was hard because he often chose to be defined by his mistakes rather than his triumphs
 - We first met Jacob struggling in the womb with his brother

- He schemed and contended against his father, against his brother, his uncle, his neighbors, his sons, and most of all the Lord
 - So Jacob is making a statement concerning his sinfulness in comparison to the lives of his forefathers
- This second interpretation fits the context of the moment far better
 - Remember, Jacob's conversation with Pharaoh turned when Jacob chose to bless Pharaoh
 - Immediately, Pharaoh begins to size up Jacob, to understand why Jacob presumed to possess the greater honor
 - So Pharaoh asks Jacob his age
 - Perhaps Jacob was much older than Pharaoh realized
 - For had Jacob been 175 or even 200 years old (which was still within reach in those days), then Pharaoh might have reason to understand Jacob's claim to honor
 - But in response, Jacob put aside any claims to worldly honor
 - Jacob says he is relatively young for this day...only 130
 - Furthermore, he obtained to less honor than his fathers, who outlived him and demonstrated a life more worthy of honor
 - This is not false modesty on Jacob's part...it's truth spoken in humility
 - Jacob does not possess a personal history that reflects honor upon himself
 - And his testimony is certainly not the source of his ability to extend a blessing to Pharaoh
 - Jacob is claiming no honor for himself, but instead he's projecting the honor that has been bestowed upon him by the word of God
 - Jacob is the man given the one and only inheritance offered by the living God
 - No other man, no other family carried that promise in his day

- Long after Pharaoh and his people have perished, Jacob and all the children of God will live and reign in glory with Christ
 - John Nelson Darby once wrote:

"The least and most faltering of God's children has the superiority . . . in the presence of the most elevated men of the world."

- And Jesus speaking to His disciples said this

[Matt. 10:17](#) "But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues;

[Matt. 10:18](#) and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.

[Matt. 10:19](#) "But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say.

[Matt. 10:20](#) "For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

- It may fall to us in God's sovereign will to stand before powerful men and women
 - Like Jacob, perhaps we might be called before a king or president
 - Or perhaps a company boss or school principal
 - And in that moment, we will have an opportunity to bring a blessing, as we learned last week
 - But it also matters how we convey that blessing
 - We come in humility, recognizing we bring nothing special in and of ourselves
 - Our power is not like their power
 - We do not pretend we have earned our worth or honor
 - We do not bless others on account of our own accomplishments, especially our spiritual accomplishments
 - Instead, we speak like Jacob
 - We discount our worth

- We acknowledge God has used greater men and women than us
- We are not especially wise, nor powerful, nor noble, to quote Paul
- We are simply vessels
- But at the same time, we do not go into those moments absent power and honor
 - We come in the name of Jesus Christ, and we bring His Spirit
 - Notice that Jacob combined two things together
 - He delivered a blessing to Pharaoh, a spiritual honor that told Pharaoh Jacob had power and authority that even Pharaoh lacked
 - And yet, Jacob delivered it in personal humility, without taking upon himself undue personal honor
 - He honored the Lord, he didn't try to rob him of His glory
 - This is the call we have been given as well, the command to go out with the Gospel of grace
 - Preaching in humility knowing we are sinners saved by the very same grace we offer to others
 - As James says

[James 1:9](#) But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; [James 1:10](#) and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away.

- And so the meeting ends, and we're told Jacob goes out from the presence of Pharaoh to settle in Goshen, just as Joseph intended
 - In Hebrew, the phrase "went out from..." conveys a sense of permanence
 - In other words, this was likely the one and only time Jacob and Pharaoh met
 - Once again, this demonstrates that the plan to keep Israel separate worked well

- From there, the family settles in and receives the best of the land
 - Joseph remains in power and ensures that the family is taken care of in Rameses
 - By the way, this mention of Rameses bothers some Biblical critics, since the Pharaoh Rameses didn't come to power until long after Israel had left Egypt in the Exodus
 - Historians assume that Rameses was named after the Pharaoh Rameses, but it's equally possible that the region lent its name to the Pharaoh
 - The name simply means "the Sun God created it"
- Having settled his family in the land, Joseph returns to running the country in the midst of a famine

Gen. 47:13 Now there was no food in all the land, because the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine.

Gen. 47:14 Joseph gathered all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan for the grain which they bought, and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house.

Gen. 47:15 When the money was all spent in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us food, for why should we die in your presence? For our money is gone."

Gen. 47:16 Then Joseph said, "Give up your livestock, and I will give you food for your livestock, since your money is gone."

Gen. 47:17 So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses and the flocks and the herds and the donkeys; and he fed them with food in exchange for all their livestock that year.

Gen. 47:18 When that year was ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord that our money is all spent, and the cattle are my lord's. There is nothing left for my lord except our bodies and our lands.

Gen. 47:19 "Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for food, and we and our land will be slaves to Pharaoh. So give us seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not be desolate."

Gen. 47:20 So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for every Egyptian sold his field, because the famine was severe upon them. Thus the land became Pharaoh's.

Gen. 47:21 As for the people, he removed them to the cities from one end of Egypt's border to the other.

Gen. 47:22 Only the land of the priests he did not buy, for the priests had an allotment from Pharaoh, and they lived off the allotment which Pharaoh gave them. Therefore, they did not sell their land.

[Gen. 47:23](#) Then Joseph said to the people, “Behold, I have today bought you and your land for Pharaoh; now, here is seed for you, and you may sow the land.

[Gen. 47:24](#) “At the harvest you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be your own for seed of the field and for your food and for those of your households and as food for your little ones.”

[Gen. 47:25](#) So they said, “You have saved our lives! Let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh’s slaves.”

[Gen. 47:26](#) Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt valid to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth; only the land of the priests did not become Pharaoh’s.

- In v.13, Moses begins to tell the story of how the famine impacted the economy of Egypt and the surrounding nations, particularly Canaan
 - To tell this story, Moses takes a step back from the narrative of Jacob and Joseph, and begins again at the beginning
 - So v.13 actually backs up to the beginning of the seven year famine
 - And from there, we learn of how the entire seven year period affected the nations
 - In the first stage, the famine brought families inside and outside Egypt to Pharaoh seeking relief
 - Everyone has exhausted their personal grain stores
 - The farmland is barren, no one is planting much less harvesting
 - People are watching their families starve, but they hear that Egypt has grain in abundance
 - We remember that the Lord had revealed to Pharaoh seven years earlier through Joseph that there was a coming famine
 - So they needed to store up for seven years and those seven years of plenty produced so much grain that they couldn’t count it all
 - Now that storage is ready to be shared with the people
 - Imagine how much grain must be stored if it is going to feed Egypt and the rest of the Middle East for seven years?
- When the time comes to feed the people, Joseph doesn’t give hand outs...he demands a price for Egypt’s grain
 - Initially, Joseph requires payment in cash

- And the money is funneled into the treasury of Egypt
- So the famine quickly begins to enrich Pharaoh's government
- After a year, the famine exhausted everyone's savings, both in Egypt and Canaan
- Remember, the cash economy was driven by farming, so with no farming taking place, the cash supply dried up
- Still, the people must eat, so they continue coming to Joseph for grain
 - And Joseph is still demanding a payment, so the people begin to barter with livestock
 - They say sensibly that their lives are worth more than livestock
 - Within another year, the nation of Egypt owned virtually all the livestock of the Middle East
 - Egypt's power and wealth has reached unprecedented heights
- After another year, everyone has traded all the livestock, but the famine continues, so they sell their land and their personal liberty for grain
 - Once again, the bargain makes sense
 - After all, isn't their personal survival worth more than their land and even their personal liberty?
 - So Joseph began to buy up all the land of the region for Pharaoh and to relocate men into Pharaoh's cities as slaves to the nation
 - They are positioned from one border of Egypt to the other
 - Furthermore, Joseph institutes a system by which the people pay Pharaoh for their grain through their labors, in the form of a 20% tax
 - Only the land devoted to the priests of Egypt were excluded from the indentured servitude
- At this point, you may be tempted to second guess Joseph's actions in all this
 - Why did he demand so much payment for the grain of Egypt?

- Shouldn't he have given it away in a more charitable fashion to the people?
- Why demand so much from them?
- Well, there are three reasons why Joseph acts in this way
 - First, this is the honorable and expected way to handle need in Joseph's day
 - The ancient world understood far better than our culture does today that it is only right to expect people to pay their own way with whatever they have
 - To give them food for nothing while they still had the means to pay a fair price was considered wrong
 - Joseph ensures that the people keep their dignity and honor even as they may be deprived of their possessions
- Secondly, it's smart conservation of his resources
 - By demanding the people trade their livestock, he relieves them of a burden they couldn't afford to keep
 - Livestock need grain too, but the people have none
 - Eventually, they would have begun to eat the farm animals before they died of starvation
 - Then everyone would have lost
 - Instead, the animals are preserved in prosperous Egypt
 - And the people are free of the burden to feed them
- Thirdly, Joseph is practicing smart economic theory
 - If Joseph had simply opened up the storehouses for free, there would have been no hesitation on the part of the people to exhaust the supplies quickly
 - When something is free and highly desirable, it won't last long
 - If the food in our grocery stores were suddenly free, how long before the shelves were bare?
 - If we charged the right fair price, things will sell, but at a manageable pace, so the resource is enough for everyone

- Each of these reasons show us that Joseph is acting in a responsible & wise way to manage Egypt's resources while treating the people with dignity
 - Even the slavery was an acceptable response to the circumstances
 - We think of slavery with disgust, and rightly so given our history with its practice
 - But slavery in this context is very different
 - It is voluntary, it is economically driven and it comes with very different conditions
 - Think of it as a job you can't afford to quit
 - One where you are owned by your boss, and you work for him to pay off a debt
 - I guess it's a lot like working in corporate America today
 - Joseph is doing everything the Lord expected, and he's doing it in his usual excellent and obedient fashion
 - By the time the famine ends, Egypt is by far the richest country in the world
 - Later, much of this wealth will come to Israel, as they grow in the land and when they plunder the land upon their Exodus
 - All wealth belongs to the Lord
 - It merely passes through men's hands for a time
 - Doing whatever God intended for it to accomplish
- As you know, Joseph pictures Jesus in so many ways, and here we see yet another of those pictures
 - When we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we place our trust and reliance in Him as our Righteousness, our Provider and our Lord
 - But as we each entered into a relationship by faith, we came pulling a wagon full of the things we've accumulated in this world
 - And for many of us, that wagon carried some very impressive things

- A huge savings account, with investments in a hundred places
 - Lots of property with houses, cars, various trinkets
- A life of achievements, degrees, awards, promotions, fame
 - Lots of followers on Facebook and Twitter
- Perhaps a testimony of beauty, brains, strength, pedigree, eloquence, sophistication
- All of these were a currency in our lives
 - They could buy us attention, respect, ego, self-worth, independence
 - When we needed a favor, we dipped into our wagon and made a withdrawal
 - These were the things we valued and held dear
- And then came Christ, our Lord and Master who offered us the one thing we didn't have but desperately needed, the daily bread of His Spirit living in us
 - Our relationship with Christ was a gift, one that is not dependent on our works, but that doesn't mean it doesn't come without a price
 - To receive the blessings and rewards of this new relationship, both in this life and beyond, our Master makes demands
 - He wants us to give up our wagon, those sources of personal wealth and power and self-worth from our life prior to faith
 - We are called to be bondservants, willingly and joyfully sacrificing even our liberty to serve the Good and Loving Master
 - Forsaking the world to receive the best He offers: eternal life and that abundantly
 - Just as Joseph took the worthless things the people possessed in exchange for giving them life