

Together . . . At Last!

Genesis 45:16-47:12

Introduction

Captain Howard Rutledge was a POW for thirteen years during the Vietnam war. The *LA Times*, on February 19, 1973, carried the story of his return home after being away for so many years.

I have a book in my study that tells this man's story. I have read it several times and it is in fact, rather dog-eared by now. Rutledge became a believer while in, what they called, the Hanoi Hilton. He trusted Christ there and God kept him over thirteen years.

The story of Howard Rutledge, in much detail in the book, tells that he sent word that he was coming home. His wife and children were ready. He did not know that by that time, he was a grandfather. One of his three daughters had married and had a son. He also did not know that his son had had an accident and was confined to a wheelchair.

His family and friends were expecting Rutledge's return and soon, he left for Los Angeles. All of the media was there, as well as thousands of people. You may have heard or read of this reunion. It showed the men disembarking from the plane and an announcer would tell the name of the man who was finally home.

Finally, the announcer said, "Captain Howard E. Rutledge." The camera scanned the audience and a lady broke free and ran into the arms of Rutledge. They embraced and you can only imagine the scene as he was reunited with his family. His son was undoubtedly anticipating his father's response, wondering, "How will he handle the fact that now I am confined to a wheelchair?" His father, as he was reunited with his son, knelt beside the wheelchair, and they gathered each other in their arms and hugged and wept.

There is something in our hearts that loves a story about a reunion; there is something in our hearts that loves going home. There is something about roots, about going back to where it all started that we love.

Perhaps it is because I have been studying this passage in Genesis that when I was in Virginia to preach at a missionary conference this past week, I decided to go back to the home where I was raised. I

had not been there to see the house in thirteen years. My brother wanted to come along too. He was available at the time, so we drove back home to 4713 Regal Court.

Everything had changed at the house, of course. Trees were gone and different things had occurred. We knocked on the door and a gal with a baby on her hip answered. I said, "My name is Stephen Davey. I was raised in this house."

She said, "For real."

I said, "Yea, for real."

She probably thought I was out on a limb somewhere. I asked, "Would you mind if we just came through and looked at the house?"

She said, "No. That would be great. Come on in."

She went upstairs and got her dad. He came down and we began going through the home. This family had purchased it from my parents, who had moved when I was a college student. We went all through that house looking at all the little nooks and corners, and nicks too – we put them there. We saw everything from the laundry shoot that we stuffed our little brother in, to the little basement, where we would hide. We went all through the downstairs and finally, upstairs to the little cubby-hole that was my bedroom after my brother went away to college. It was there that, as an eighteen year old, I remember kneeling and giving my life to Jesus Christ. After thirteen years, it was quite an interesting experience going back there.

There is something about going back. The moment we began studying Joseph's life, we were all waiting to get to this chapter. If we had not had so much to learn in the process, we would have gone directly to this part, as, finally, he is reunited with his father. Let us take a closer look.

Joseph Sends His Brothers Home For Jacob

You may remember, if you have been studying with us, that the brothers have come to Egypt and Joseph has finally announced in the Hebrew dialect, "Ana Yowceph!" or "I am Joseph!"

The brothers were terrified. Their legs trembled and they were afraid that now, they would get the ax.

Joseph, however, was very compassionate. He told his brothers to go home to Dad and, “Tell Jacob that I’m alive. And I have an open invitation for you to come back and to live with me.”

That is where we pick up the story today, as he is saying goodbye to his brothers and sending them home to get Jacob.

The favor of Pharaoh – his promise and provision

Note, in verses 17 and 18 of chapter 45, the favor that Pharaoh has given these brothers.

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Say to your brothers, ‘Do this: load your beasts and go to the land of Canaan, and take your father and your households and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you will eat the fat of the land.’”

We do not know why, but perhaps the Hyksos dynasty, as we think, was a shepherding dynasty. They were a little more sympathetic to this shepherd family.

Then Pharaoh says, in verse 19,

“Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come.”

Now, when we read a verse like that, we immediately think that he is talking about some wooden, rickety old carts with wheels that are about to fall off. In other words, “Take these old, rickety carts, with some donkeys pulling them, and go get your family.”

However, if we were to go back to that time culturally, carts were an unheard of thing. Everyone at that time, walked or rode a beast. But the Pharaoh had, in a sense, the automobiles; the transportation – he had carts. These carts were covered with gold, bedecked with jewels, pulled by handsome animals, and attended by the finest of Pharaoh’s court. You just did not ride in a cart unless you were somebody.

Imagine this entourage of gold-covered carts pulling into a famished area like Canaan, where they had never seen anything like that. The Pharaoh said, in effect, “Go in style. Go back and get all of your family and bring them back in wagons.”

Today, this would be equivalent to a limousine service. This was probably the talk of Canaan for decades.

So the sons of Israel did just that.

An interesting command from Joseph, “Do not quarrel”

Verse 22 tells us that Joseph then,

To each of them he gave changes of garments, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of garments.

Joseph sent them to his father, but with an interesting command. Note verse 24.

So he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, “Do not quarrel on the journey.”

Two reasons the brothers might quarrel

Now, I have to stop and ask the question, “Why would these brothers quarrel? I thought everything was patched up now.”

Let me give two reasons why I think it is possible that they would break into quarreling.

Sudden wealth

1. The first reason is because of sudden wealth.

Where they came from, you did not have silver; you did not have hard, cold cash. In their culture, you traded in goats milk and wool; you lived close to the earth.

Now, however, these men had been given an incredible amount of money. And wealth, as you and I know, does not tend to unify; wealth tends to separate; to cause problems. So perhaps it is the sudden wealth of these brothers that would bring about the problem.

I think, as well, there is a hidden, subtle temptation in that Benjamin is given more. Benjamin is given five times more garments.

As I studied and re-studied this passage, I thought we could learn the following principle in this:

Repentance does not alleviate future temptation.

Just because the brothers had repented of their sin of dishonesty; of living a lie, they were, in a sense, still having to handle the temptation of dishonesty. They could, as they had done to Joseph, bump Benjamin off, take what he had, go back to Canaan with another story, and live wealthy lives.

Serious confrontation

2. I think, the second reason the brothers might quarrel is perhaps more significant and closer to the truth, and that is, there was the knowledge of serious confrontation.

Now they were going back to Canaan and were going to have to tell their father that they had lied. They were going to have to tell the story of what had happened. They could not just walk up, and just say, “Your son is alive. Joseph is alive.” – which is all the text relates that they say. No. Dad would say, “Now wait a second! Twenty-five years ago, you brought me a blood-stained tunic. What happened? What really happened?”

They knew there would be confrontation involved. They would have to confess; they would have to admit everything to Jacob.

Let me give this principle:

Repentance does not erase future consequences.

They had to go and tell Dad that they had lied.

Perhaps you have brothers and sisters. Having three brothers myself, I can well remember many times of doing something wrong – led astray by one of my brothers – and having to admit it to our dad.

I can still remember my brother and I getting into trouble at school one day. In the two blocks from the school bus stop to our house, we argued the whole way as to what the story would be.

“Well, let’s say this.”

“No, let’s not say that, let’s say this.”

We bickered, “You let me take care of it.”

“No, you let me handle it.”

Well, what do we have here? We have eleven brothers who are having to go back to their father and tell him what happened. I can just hear it now.

I can hear Reuben, “Now look, you need to make sure, when we tell him the story, that you leave me out of it because I wasn’t there. You remember that.”

I can hear Judah saying, “Well, don’t forget that it was my idea to sell him to the Midianites and not kill him.”

Benjamin is saying, “Now wait a second guys! I’m not part of this. I wasn’t even there.”

“Oh? Who do you think you are, you goody, goody? We’re going to tell him whatever we want to tell him.”

I can see eleven brothers, by the time they end their three week journey, at each others throats. I think that is the reason why Joseph says, in verse 24, “Listen, don’t quarrel on the journey.”

Joseph knows his brothers. When they are heading back with money and garments that they have never had before, he says to these rough men; these men of the earth, “Don’t bicker. Don’t start trading your outfits. Don’t quarrel about what you have. Don’t look at Benjamin and get upset because he’s been given so much more. And whatever you do, don’t begin to argue about the story you’ll tell Jacob, our dad. Just go back and tell him I’m alive.”

I wish we had been in the cart to listen to the stories of these brothers as they returned home. They did return and went to Jacob and said, “You won’t believe this,” and, according to verse 26,

They told him, saying, “Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.” But he [Jacob] was stunned, for he did not believe them.”

Jacob’s heart went numb. Continue to verse 27.

When they told him all the words of Joseph that he had spoken to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.

When Jacob saw the gold-covered carts; when he saw the jewelry; when he saw their garments, he knew that Joseph must, indeed, be alive, and his spirit revived.

Jacob Reveals Evidence of His Faith in God

Now we have studied the life of Jacob, but we need to pause and focus on him for a moment. If this is the old Jacob, he will pack the suitcases, load up the baggage, and without further ado, head for Egypt.

Jacob prays before entering Egypt

However, Egypt, as you may remember, is warned of by the prophets. Egypt, Jacob remembers, was the place where Abraham, his grandfather, lied and got away from the Lord. Egypt was also where Isaac, Jacob's father, was warned not to follow in his father's footsteps in going to Egypt. So Jacob thinks, "I can't go to Egypt if I am to be obedient to God."

All of a sudden, Jacob is faced with a tremendous struggle. He decides to do something that is uncharacteristic of Jacob – he decides to stop and pray. Look at verse 1 of chapter 46.

So Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

Beersheba is the southern-most tip of Canaan; it is just before you cross the border. When Jacob gets to that southern-most tip, before he takes a step into the desert that will lead him to Egypt, he stops and offers sacrifices, probably at the same place where Abraham and Isaac had in Beersheba.

Now I do not know what Jacob said in his prayer was, but he must have said something like, "God, You know that my son is there. You know that food is there. You know that the promise is that we will multiply, so it makes sense that I should go to Egypt."

Why should he even pray? I cannot help but apply this directly to you and me. If we were given the same conditions – more money, closeness to family members, a better situation, the ability to provide so much more by leaving, by pulling up roots – would we even think that God was not in it? Yet Jacob stops and says, in effect, "Lord, what should I do?"

Look at verses 2 and 3 and note the use of the name "Israel" for Jacob, which means, "Prince of God".

God spoke to Israel in visions . . . and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." 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."

Solid evidence of inspiration – prophecy of an expansion

In the margin of your text, let me give two words to write. The first can be written at the end of verse 3, and is the word, "expansion".

These are self-contained prophecies in the book of Genesis; that is, we will see them prophesied and, in a later book, we will see them fulfilled. That is one of the greatest proofs of inspiration – expansion.

God says, in verse 3, "You go to Egypt,"

. . . for I will make you a great nation there.

Now verses 26 and 27 of chapter 46 tell us that sixty-six people in Jacob's family were heading to Egypt, making seventy in all, when Joseph's family is counted.

Prior to this, Abraham had been given the promise of a great nation – yet there were only seventy people. Isaac had been given the promise of a great nation – yet there were only seventy people. To Jacob, God had reiterated that same covenant promise, saying, "I will make you a great nation," but still, three generations later, all he could count was seventy people.

Yet we will learn in Exodus, chapter 15, that when they make their exodus from Egypt, after staying there for many years, nearly four million people will leave. Seventy people are multiplied into four million – that is a self-fulfilled prophecy.

Solid evidence of inspiration – prophecy of an exodus

The beginning of verse 4 contains the second word, which is, "exodus". Note that He promises an exodus to Jacob, saying,

I will go down with you to Egypt . . .

He continues in that verse to say,

. . . and I will also surely bring you up again

. . .

He is saying, "Don't worry, I'm with you, but I will also bring you back."

In other words, "Although you're going to Egypt, which is not part of the promise, I will bring you back to Canaan; to the promised land. Don't be afraid. This is My way of multiplying this tribe into a nation in the region of Goshen, which is very fertile – the best that Egypt has to offer."

So Jacob stops to pray and God gives him the confidence and encouragement that he should go.

Joseph and His Father are Reunited at Last

Now, at last, the reunion occurs. Look at verses 27b through 28 of chapter 46.

. . . All the persons of the house of Jacob, who came to Egypt, were seventy. Now he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out the way before him to Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen.

Joseph got the news from a messenger and as soon as he did, I have the idea that he went by himself, unattended. Look at verse 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.

It is hard for us to identify with this kind of reunion. We have probably never experienced anything like this, even in our own personal lives. All we can do is go back twenty-five years when this dad and son were torn apart by the jealousy of brothers. They had not seen each other in almost twenty-five years.

Now Jacob, finally, sees Joseph's chariot coming. In the dimness of his eyesight, he looks and sees this Egyptian monarch riding toward him in a chariot of gold, pulled by prancing steeds. I would imagine he thought, "That can't be Joseph."

Yet Joseph, wearing the headdress worn by Egyptian royalty, dressed with all the Egyptian garb, and clean-shaven, unlike a Hebrew, finally reigns in his horses. He steps down off the chariot and walks over to his dad. Perhaps it is then that his father looked closely and recognized, "Yes, this is Joseph."

We do not know of any words that were said. All they did was embrace and weep for a long time. Finally, through his sobs, Jacob lifts his voice and says, in verse 30,

. . . Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive.

In other words, "This is the fulfillment of my life. My son that I thought was taken from me, is back. If I'm going to die happy, let me die now."

It is all Jacob could utter. What a reunion that must have been!

Joseph reveals two important elements of family life

What happens next is a further indication of Joseph's character. Let me give two important

elements about Joseph's life that should be characterized in our lives as well.

A sense of family responsibility, regardless of how painful the past

1. First, Joseph had a sense of family responsibility, regardless of how painful the past.

Joseph had every right to stick his brothers in some corner and forget them, while elevating his beloved father, Jacob. Yet, he continues to evidence forgiveness. Look at chapter 47, verse 11a.

So Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land . . .

Regardless of how painful the abandonment was; regardless of how cruel they had been, refusing to listen, as he pleaded that they not send him away with the Midianites, now, twenty-five years later, Joseph gives his brothers the best of the land. I wonder if we can have that sense of forgiveness in our hearts for those in our past.

A sense of family pride, regardless of how humble the origin

2. Joseph also had a sense of family pride, regardless of how humble the origin.

This is beautiful. His dad is a humble shepherd. He is dressed roughly and is perhaps even a little uncouth. He is used to living out in a tent close to the earth. His fingernails are dirty and his face is unshaven. I can imagine, once they are reunited, Joseph talking with his dad, and his dad saying, "Joseph, tell me about your work. I'd like to go see it some time."

"No, Dad, you don't want to get around the court of Egypt. That's really not the place for you."

Joseph could have had an attitude of cover-up; of embarrassment; of keeping his father away. Just think of how humble his origin was, but now, he is prime minister of Egypt. However, do you know what Joseph does? He arranges for a personal introduction. Look at verse 7.

Then Joseph brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

Joseph presented his father as he would a dignitary; as he would someone of great prestige; someone of diplomatic relationship. He treats his one hundred thirty year old, stoop-shouldered father in this manner. Joseph proudly says, "Pharaoh, I want you to meet my father."

I would imagine the courtroom buzzed with people saying, "That's Joseph's father? Why certainly he was groomed for years for this position! He must have come from wealth. This shepherd is his father?!"

We know that shepherds were loathsome to the Egyptians. Yet Joseph, probably sticking his chest out, says to all that court, "This is my dad."

How often a young man or woman will rise to prominence and, in the process, forget their origin.

I think of Marian Anderson, a famous black contralto, who had won a number of awards and had been, among other things, a United States delegate to the United Nations. She had given private concerts for President's families, as well as for the King and Queen of England. She had been presented with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. She had written an autobiography that was an instant best seller. On one occasion the press cornered her and said, "Marian, what is the greatest moment of your life?"

She said, without even blinking, "The greatest moment was when I went back to the tenement house to my mamma and told her she wouldn't have to take in washing anymore."

Of all the times in Joseph's life to be embarrassed; to be ashamed of where he had come from, this was it. Instead, he introduces his father with great respect and pride to the Pharaoh.

Jacob's appearance before Pharaoh

I love the words that Jacob said to Pharaoh. Look at verses 9 and 10, as he said,

. . . "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." And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from his presence.

A declaration of life's brevity

This is really a testimony that we miss in our translations; in our cultural distances. What Jacob was really doing, as he stood before the Pharaoh, was mustering up his faith in God, and twice he references sojourning or a pilgrimage. To the man who, to that culture, was the embodiment of the sun god Ray, who would live forever, Jacob, in effect, was saying, "We will die."

Jacob said, "I have lived one hundred thirty years in my pilgrimage," and, in effect, was saying, "You are on a pilgrimage too, oh great Pharaoh, and you will die."

A testimonial of God's sovereignty

It was a tremendous declaration of life's brevity to a man who was worshipped as god. However, it was also a testimonial of God's sovereignty. He briefly, in just a few words, refers to his fathers and their pilgrimage, and then says, "And I, in line now, am a pilgrim with them."

Jacob could have stumbled all over his feet trying to say something that would impress the Pharaoh. He could have immediately started bragging on his son and all he had done to make Joseph what he ended up being. Yet, for just a few brief moments, he stands before Pharaoh and acknowledges the sovereignty of God. He says, in effect, "God has led me in this pilgrimage. And I am following in the line of those who follow God."

Note that twice, Jacob does something to Pharaoh. What does he do? He blesses him! We cannot understand that, but he is in the court of a pagan, idolatrous king, and he blesses him.

In America, we think "Well, what did he do? Say, 'Good morning,' and then, 'Have a good afternoon.'?"

No. This was a bestowing of an acknowledgment of the God who blesses. We do not know what he said. All we know is that Jacob held out his trembling, old hand and blessed Pharaoh. Then, he left.

Application

I cannot help but think, as I view this reunion, of what it signifies to us. Joseph is a type of Jesus Christ, with many illustrations of things that are foreshadowed that would be fulfilled in the life of Christ.

One thing that strikes me is included in the message Joseph gave to his brothers. That is the

message I want to leave with you. Joseph basically told his brothers to do three things. He said, “I want you to go back – go back to your family, go back to your friends, go back to the relatives, go back to the tribe – and tell them that:

- I am alive;
- I am exalted; I am the lord of all of Egypt;
- there is an open invitation for them to come and live with me.”

Do you see it? Jesus Christ, the anti-type, has come and given us, His brethren, a message. He says, “Go back to where you have had roots – go back to your family, go back to your tribe, go into the neighborhood where you are – and tell them that:

- Jesus Christ is alive;
- Jesus Christ is exalted;
- there is an open invitation to come and live with Me.”

What a reunion that will be! As the song says,
What a day that will be when my Jesus I shall see

And I look upon His face, the One who saved me by His grace.

When He takes me by the hand and leads me through the Promised Land.

What a day, glorious day that will be.