

What kind of life would you like?

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- [0 : 00] Hollywood endings, aren't we? Where the hero defeats the villain, saves the world, everyone lives happily ever after. Or, the boy overcomes odds to win the girl's heart, they get married, and again they live happily ever after.
- But have you ever, like me, ever wondered about the happily ever after? What life would have been like then? Was everything a bed of roses?
- Did everyone live in peace and harmony thereafter? Or were there more battles and conflicts? Did the happy couple struggle when they had children?
- Sleepless nights and crying babies? And then rebellious teenage children? Well, if you were here last Sunday, we came to a happily ever after moment in our series.
- In chapter 45, Jacob finally discovers that his son is alive. The tension that has existed since Genesis 37, when we all knew that Joseph was alive, and yet Jacob didn't, that tension is finally broken.
- [1 : 11] Throughout his grief and mourning, throughout all these weeks, we were tempted, wouldn't we, if we could, to reach into the story, to tell him, Jacob, it's okay. Joseph is well.
- Well, it finally happened last week. And such was Jacob's joy, that despite his old age, we read in verse 28 of the last chapter, that he resolved to go to Egypt to see Joseph.
- That was the happily ever after moment. Now, for us with modern transportation in this age, this might seem like an obvious thing to do.
- But actually, there are layers of complexity to that choice. First of all, Joseph was actually quite an old man. And being the patriarch of the family, actually, it would have been expected that it would be Joseph that would return to Canaan, especially now that he has the trappings of power, you know, just call the com car or whatever, Air Force One, and fly back down to see that.
- It would have been an easier trip to make. But second, and more importantly, it was Jacob that was actually in the land of promise. He had gone away before, and then upon his return, God had promised to bless him in the land.
- [2 : 28] And so he would have been loathed to leave it again, and to leave God's place of blessing. But thirdly, if Jacob had remembered everything that happened to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac, then Egypt was simply not a place to go.
- Abraham did it when there was a famine in his time, and he got Sarah into trouble. Likewise, Isaac was about to head to Egypt again during a famine when God appeared to him and told him not to do so.
- And so Jacob would have known that this was a no-go zone, and the only thing that was drawing him there, really, was his son Joseph and his overwhelming desire to see him before he died, which is why the passage that Annette read for us was significant, because God appears to Jacob and tells him he has God's blessing to go to Egypt.
- So if you look at verse 3, verse 3, sorry, or 45 with me, Jacob is told, do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there.

So not only is it okay to go, but actually he'll stay there for a while, unlike how often grandparents would go and visit and then come back afterwards.

[3 : 51] No, no, this was going to be a visit that would be for a while, so long that God would actually make Jacob into a great nation in Egypt. And remember God's original promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, the promise to make him a great nation?

Well, that was not going to be put on hold just because Jacob was now in Egypt and out of the promised land. Instead, God goes on to promise, I will go down to Egypt with you.

And that, you know, makes sense because God's sovereignty is not tied just to the land of Canaan. But God is actually in control across the whole world.

He has no territory or political boundaries to observe, unlike how the other nations would have thought about their gods. And then finally God says as well, I will surely bring you back and Joseph's own hand will close your eyes.

And that I think for Jacob would have been such a comforting assurance God would eventually bring Israel back from Egypt. But for Jacob personally, Joseph will be with him right by his side as he draws his final breath.

[5 : 13] And so with that, Jacob takes all he has, his sons and daughters and their wives and children and all their possession and they set out for Egypt. They're going to Egypt with God's blessing.

Now Annette skipped over the next 20 verses in our reading. But what we have here from verses 8 to 27 is just a list of all of Jacob's offspring. Now I don't propose to read them all.

The individual names are not important. But they're listed according to Jacob's sons. First those who are born to Leah, Jacob's first wife, then to Leah's maidservant, Zilpah, then Rachel, Rachel's sons, Jacob's second wife, and Bilhah, which is Rachel's maidservant.

The key to the whole passage though is what we read in verse 26. It says, All those who went to Egypt with Jacob, those who were his direct descendants, not counting his sons' wives, numbered 66 persons.

With the two sons who had been born to Joseph in Egypt, the members of Jacob's family which went to Egypt were 70 in all. That is 66 plus Joseph plus the two sons plus Jacob.

[6 : 25] That's 70. Now if you're been bean counter like me, I actually did it. I went through the whole list and counted all the names. And if you take away Ur and Onan, Jodah's sons who were killed or died, then you include Joseph's sons and all the daughters as well and then Jacob himself, you come up with 70.

Okay? So trust me. There is a bit of discrepancy with the Septuagint about 75 and all that, but let's not get into it. 70 is what we're going with. The point of all this detail though is to say that these were all of Jacob's descendants, everyone who was counted in God's blessings.

And they all add up to 70 which is actually a symbolic number for completeness. Seven by ten, seven being the complete number of days of creation.

So what this represents is a list of God's, Israel's, the united people of Israel, God's people. This was the full number of God's people.

And when Jacob brings them to Egypt and they are reunited with Joseph, this will be the first time since chapter 37 when actually all of them are back together again in one place.

[7 : 40] And what is more, they're not just back together physically, they're back together relationally as well, reconciled and united in heart. And so what we have in this first section is that as Jacob and his sons go down to Egypt, they're going firstly with God's blessing and secondly, they're going as God's united people.

Thereafter, from verse 28 onwards, we then have two rather long narratives. The first one is around a negotiation as to where Israel will settle in Egypt.

And then the second is describing the fate of Egypt in the famine. And at first, it may be hard to work out what's going on, but as we shall see, both are related.

They both show, or they show two ways of living in Egypt. One way is shown in the lives of the Israelites and the other, the lives of the Egyptians. And from these two examples, what we learn is that Israel is called to live in, but not be of Egypt.

And that's my second heading. So the first aspect of this is from verse 28 of chapter 26 to verse 12 of chapter 47, where the picture is of Israel settling in Goshen, but away from Egypt.

[9 : 05] Here, the story begins with Joseph going to great lengths to coach his brothers, telling them to make it be known that they are shepherds. So in verse 31, and we'll read from there, Joseph says to them, I will go up and speak to Pharaoh and will say to him, My brothers and my father's household who were living in the land of Canaan have come to me.

The men are shepherds. They tend livestock and have brought along their flocks and herds and everything they own. When Pharaoh calls you in, ask, and ask, what is your occupation?

You should answer, your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did. Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians.

And that, we see in chapter 47, verses 3 to 6, is exactly what they do. They repeat exactly what Joseph asked them to do. Now, initially, this would be somewhat surprising because even when Joseph tells them that, to say this, he tells them that all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians.

A reason probably is because shepherding is a lowly occupation and therefore shunned by the Egyptians. And yet, Joseph wants them to say that. Even though it may be that with such a large family, they would have had male servants to help them tend the livestock.

[10 : 33] But he wants them to say, no, we ourselves are shepherds and we look after the livestock ourselves. And what is the reason for that? Well, it's so that they can settle in Goshen, which as far as we know is fertile country for crops and sheep.

So, if you look on the map, Goshen is that eastern part. Actually, the green bit is not actually right. It's actually further southeast. It's in the eastern part of lower Egypt.

So, the river now runs from south to north and as it gets to Cairo, thereabouts, it splits up and it looks like an upturned umbrella. And Goshen is on the right tributary, which is sort of nearest to Canaan.

In chapter 47, verse 12, it's also referred to as the district of Ramses and you see the name of that city on the map. But both in verse 12 and then in verse 6 as well, it refers to that land as being the best part of the land.

Best part, I think, because it's good for agriculture. Further, as we discover in chapter 45 and verse 10, that was last week, Goshen, and so we should go to the next slide if we can, Goshen is actually near where Joseph will be.

[11 : 52] So, that's another reason why Joseph would want them to stay in Goshen. But the real benefit of being in Goshen, however, is that they would then be separate from the population centers of Egypt.

some distance from the centers of power. If you remember, the Egyptians detested the shepherds, right? So they wouldn't be living where the shepherds would be. So analogy of this might be, you know, those living in Turek or some posh eastern suburb like Doncaster, not wanting to move to a rural town, for example, out in country Victoria, even though the land there for farming is great.

I'm sure you'll all be happy to move to the country of Victoria, but it's sort of like that. They were therefore shunned by the general Egyptian population which allowed the Israelites to keep to themselves.

And so, there was probably less pressure to intermarry, less pressure to adopt the religious practices of the Egyptians and allowed them therefore to remain faithful to God.

And then by contrast, we see in the other narrative what happened to the rest of Egypt. We're reminded in verse 13, if you look there, of 47, that the whole region is still in famine.

[13 : 12] In fact, we know that there's another five years to go. But unlike Israel, the famine meant for the rest of Egypt, what it meant for the rest of Egypt was that eventually they found themselves in slavery to Pharaoh.

So first, in verse 14, we read, the Egyptians spent all their money to buy the stored grain. But then when the money was gone, verse 16, Joseph then next agrees to exchange the food for their livestock.

So they've got no more money, so they bring their horses, their sheep, their goat, their cattle, and donkey, and they gave it up for food. That goes on for another year, but then the next year, when all the livestock had been exchanged, they come to Joseph again and say, in verse 18, that all that's left are their bodies and their land.

And then they say in verse 19, why should we perish before your eyes, we and our land as well, buy us and our land in exchange for food, and we with our land will be in bondage to Pharaoh.

Give us seed so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate. Then verse 20, so Joseph bought all the land in Egypt for Pharaoh.

[14 : 31] The Egyptians, one and all, sold their fields because the famine was too severe for them. The land became Pharaoh's and Joseph reduced the people to servitude from one end of Egypt to the other.

It goes on then to say that only the priests were spared because they get an allotment of food from Pharaoh. And then what happens next in verse 23 is that Joseph set about to get the people to work on the fields.

So they are now bonded servants of Pharaoh and everything they grew, they took 20% off. He took 20% off as a tax for Pharaoh. What a drastic turn of fortune, isn't it?

From being land owners and livestock owners at the start of the famine, which is only five years ago, they are reduced to tenant farmers, slave farmers, by the end of the famine.

And the irony of it shouldn't be lost on us because Egypt was meant to be the lucky country. It was Pharaoh who had the dream and Joseph was there to foretell the famine and so they were prepared for it.

[15 : 44] Joseph had told them to store up during the fat years. And yet, all of that was for nothing to them because they ended up being slaves to Pharaoh.

Still, in verse 25, they were at least grateful to be alive, and they were actually very thankful to be slaves rather than to be dead. But so wide-ranging were these changes that we read in verse 26, that even up to today, that is up to the date of the writing of this passage, they were still in force many years after the famine.

But again, the key verse to this whole passage is found at the end in verse 27, because we see the contrast with Israel, the so-called detestable shepherds.

So look there and see what happened. Now the Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number.

Not only were the Israelites spared slavery like the Egyptians, they even prospered and increased in number and became rich with property. Now humanly speaking, that was because of Joseph as the governor providing for them, but spiritually speaking, it's because God was ultimately their provider.

[17 : 03] God was upholding his promise to Jacob to bless them, even while they were in the land of Egypt, outside the promised land. And Jacob, to his great credit, did not lose sight of that because the chapter ends with him securing a promise from Joseph not to bury him in the land of Egypt, but to carry him back to the promised land for burial.

It would be quite easy, wouldn't it, for Jacob and his sons to get comfortable, to ride on the coattails of Joseph's power, and to settle in the security of Goshen.

I mean, we would know that ourselves, wouldn't we? When a good fortune comes to us, we sort of tend to very easily get used to it, isn't it? We've got a promotion or we've done well, all of a sudden it feels like, oh, we could live with this, we could settle like this.

But Jacob knew this wasn't his final resting place. And so he says to Joseph, it's verse 29, if I have found favor in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness.

Do not bury me in Egypt, but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried. And so insistent on this is that even when Joseph promises, Jacob says, no, swear to me that you do this.

[18 : 29] And Joseph does it. So ultimately what this whole long narrative shows us is that even though Israel was in Egypt, they were not offered.

Ultimately, they didn't belong in Egypt, even though they acquired land and property and settled there. And although it seemed like they had second best at first, you know, going to Goshen where the Egyptians detested, God provided for them.

God kept them free from slavery. And then finally Jacob learned to live by faith, to know that the promise was not back in Egypt, but back in the final resting place of Canaan.

And as we look at this story, there are actually many striking parallels for us as Christians, because just like Israel, we are called not to be in the world, sorry, we're called to be in the world, but not of it.

We too have been rescued by Jesus, who saved us not from famine physically, but from a spiritual famine, from our sin and our rebellion against God.

[19 : 39] And when we believe in his son, we then have eternal life, and we are called out of this world. That was what the second reading tonight was, the prayer, if you recall, I'm going to read from verse 15, it should be on the slide.

Jesus prayed this, my prayer is not that you, Father, take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

Sanctify them by the truth, your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that you too may be truly sanctified.

Now, this prayer was firstly prayed by Jesus for his twelve disciples, but it extends to the rest of us as well. That even though we are saved, we are to remain in the world, we are even sent back into the world to live for him, but we are not of the world, just as Christ himself is not of it.

Because when we are in Christ, we belong with him to the new creation. And so, brothers and sisters, as we go about our lives, on the surface, it may not look very different from everyone else.

[20 : 59] we still live in the same sort of houses. If there's a power outage or a storm, we get the brunt of it just like everyone else.

Likewise, we're not exempted from the pressures of life, from exams, from having to turn up to work on time. We still have to go through the same performance reviews as everyone else.

We get stuck in traffic jams. we still have to run to catch that peak hour train. And yet, our place in this world is fundamentally different from everyone else.

We march not to the drumbeat of the world, but to God's drumbeat. That is, the priorities and dreams of others in this world, they no longer occupy us.

You know, people are striving to make it in this world. We don't need to do that. Worldly success and wealth is their ultimate aim, because they have nothing else to aim for.

[22 : 04] But that's not our goal anymore, because God has promised us much more, not worldly success and fame in this life, but riches in His kingdom.

And so, as a consequence, we are called to live differently, because the priorities drive what we do and how we spend our time. And people may look at us, as the Egyptians did with Israel, and called them detestable shepherds.

They may look at us like that as well, and look down upon the way we live. For instance, they might, you know, look down on the way we hold to sexual ethics, to be chaste outside marriage, to be faithful within it, and they would go, why are you depriving yourself of all these pleasures in life?

Or they may look at us and go, how silly are you to live for others, to serve others, when that prevents you from getting promoted, from getting the recognition that you deserve?

Or they may say, why are you spending so much time at church when you could be partying and networking instead? Why pass up the opportunity to get ahead in the company and spend time instead on a Friday being a youth leader?

[23 : 19] Or why be so generous with your hard-earned cash and give it to gospel ministry when you can spend it on a good holiday? On this and so many other fronts, people may mock us or detest us because we are Christian.

And yet the reality is, like Israel, we know that we are free from the slavery of this world because greed and selfish ambition no longer rules us, neither the fleeting pleasures of this world.

And so, you know, we don't need to be jealous or envious of the so-called success of this world because we're not measuring ourselves by their yardstick. We are the ones that have true freedom.

We are the ones that have true riches. Instead, just as Jacob did, we are to fix our eyes on our true resting place, not Canaan like him, but for us, God's eternal kingdom.

And we live more and more according to God's promises and set our hearts on him, then what we do is we start storing up riches and treasures in that kingdom where it truly counts.

[24 : 35] And we can be assured, just like Jacob, that God will then one day, as he's promised Jacob, promise us to bring us back to this wonderful final place of rest when our life on earth is done.

And that's truly freeing, isn't it? If we can live like that, with that promise in view, it frees up our life now to make costly decisions for him, to be generous with our time and our money, perhaps to even give our lives to be a minister of the gospel, if that's how we're called and the gifts that we have.

Friends, if any of this sounds foreign to any of you, because you have not come to know Jesus yet, then please can I urge you to put your trust in Jesus, because that's the only way to true freedom.

But if you already trust in Jesus, then perhaps tonight might be a chance to just take stock of where our life is. Firstly, for example, have we allowed the trappings of this world to entrap us again?

When it shouldn't. What kind of life are we living? One that is driven by the desire to secure our place in this world? Or we actually know our eyes are fixed firmly on that final resting place with Jesus?

[25 : 58] And then I've got thirdly on the slide a last question to ponder. Are we fearful of being detestable in the sight of the world? Or are we unashamed of the Lord Jesus because that is where true freedom lies?

So I'm going to leave those three questions on the slide. I'll give you a minute or two to just reflect and perhaps pray in response to that. And then I'll close in prayer for all of us.

Let's do that now. Father, for those of us who have come to you tonight seeking to trust in your son Jesus for the first time in their lives, please give them your assurance of salvation, knowing that their sins are forgiven.

help them to know their freedom from the power of sin and the temptations of this world. Receive them into the body of Christ to take their place among God's people by your spirit.

For those of us who seek to live out our calling as disciples of Jesus, sent into the world, to remain in it but not of it, help us to be courageous with our Christian identity, to be unashamed to be counted as a follower of Jesus in word and deed, even if we suffer ridicule for it.

[27 : 15] Purify our hearts so that we will not be entangled again with the desires and ambition that dominate the world, but help us to see the great blessing that we already possess in Christ Jesus, which far outweighs whatever illusions, this world has to offer.

All this we ask in the most precious and mighty name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.