

FACING CHANGE BY FAITH

GENESIS 46

Need: To face the changes in life by faith.

Proposition: Jacob demonstrates for us how to face change as a person of faith.

Objective: To prepare God's people for the changes of life.

Introduction:

At what age does life settle down and things quit changing? It must be some point beyond the age of one hundred and thirty. This was the age of Jacob when he made his move from Canaan to Egypt. This represented in his life a major change-as it would for anyone. Making a move is listed as one the major causes of distress. It is right up beside such things as death in the family and divorce.

How do you react to change? We most commonly react to major changes that impact our lives with fear and uncertainty. There must have been some

of this in the heart of Jacob because God specifically tells him: "Fear not!" This fear will often cause us to reject change-if we have a choice. As far as we can tell from this inspired record Jacob did not try to avoid the change even though it did create some fear in his heart.

Change may also cause grief. Even though Jacob had spent twenty years in the land of Haran, a foreign country, Canaan was still the place of his birth, the place of his early childhood, the place where his beloved Rachael was buried, the place where his parents and grandparents were buried. Can you imagine moving away from all of this without some sense of loss? He has never been to Egypt, and quite frankly, had no desire to live in Egypt. The move to Egypt was not his idea.

When we moved from First Baptist Church for a sojourn in the Egypt of denominational service, the change caused much grief to my dear wife. We were at a conference at one of the conference centers for a week, and she was attending one of the conferences. A man who was a professional counselor was leading it. He shared with the class about a major move that had taken place in his life. He described how he went out into his yard and gave a goodbye to each of the trees in the yard, and said good-byes to other things

around the house. I guess Alice forgot to say goodbye to the trees in our yard on twenty-third street. Change brought much grief to her.

How do you make the changes of life into positive experiences? We might learn something from Jacob about facing change by faith-rather than fear.

I. REMEMBER THAT GOD IS THE ENGINEER OF CHANGE.

At least this was true in the life of Jacob. Failure to see the hand of God in the changes that come into our lives can lead to all kinds of problems.

1. Through His Providences.

Even though the sons of Jacob were responsible for many heartaches that he knew in life, they did not cause the famine that made the trip to Egypt necessary. Jacob had created many problems for himself through his selfish blunders, like his experiences with his brother Esau, but he had not caused the seven years of privation that had come upon the land. By the visions that He gave to Pharaoh we know that it was the hand of God that brought the seven years of famine Canaan.

This will be true for most of the changes that hit our lives. Texas Instruments does not close because of some error of judgment that you have made; rather it is better to see the providence of God in such a closing. You were not left

a widow because of your blunders; rather it is better to see the hand of God in your widowhood. You do not have to give up your independence and move to a retirement center because you did not obey your parents as a child, rather in the providence of God you have been chosen to enjoy a long life-too long for continued independence. Leaving home to go to college is not a punishment; rather it is a providential part of life. Much change should be accepted as being the result of divine providence.

2. According to His Plan.

When it first became obvious to Jacob that he would have to move to Egypt, he did not know that this was a part of the divine plan for the development of Israel into a nation. God revealed this to him only when he was already on his way to Egypt. It was a part of the revelation to him when he stopped to worship God at Beersheba. Actually it was the plan of God that the descendents of Jacob spend the next four hundred years in Egypt. They stayed long enough to multiply to the point that they would numerically be strong enough to occupy the land of Canaan. They stayed in the midst of Egypt long enough to develop their own sense of separate identity from the other nations. They stayed long enough to know that they were not

Egyptians, and hopefully that they were not followers of the gods of the Egyptians. The difficult change was all in the plan of God!

Do we dare believe that God has a plan to bring something good out of the difficult changes that are forced upon us? I remember with gratitude the way Mrs. Reynolds responded to the changes that were forced on her at age eighty-nine. She just assumed that her move to Texas was in the plan of God. I never heard a word of protest or complaint from her. Remember how she touched our lives and this church in those brief five years that the Lord let her live among us? Change often comes because God engineers it.

II. SEE CHANGE AS A TIME TO DRAW NEAR TO GOD.

This was how Jacob responded to the move to Egypt. He drew near to God in worship and surrender.

1. In Worship.

Beersheba was a familiar place to family of Jacob. After a difficult time with some of his neighbors, Abraham had planted a tree, built an altar and called on the name of the Lord at Beersheba. I wonder if Jacob saw the tree that his grandfather had planted? Were the stones of Abraham's altar still in place?

Isaac had also had a meeting with God at Beersheba. It came after a time of conflict with his neighbors. During the night the Lord came to him and renewed the covenant that he had made with Abraham with Isaac. After the appearance of the Lord Isaac also built an altar and dug a well at Beersheba. I wonder if parts of his altar were still standing when Jacob arrived? Did he drink from the well that his father had dug? You can imagine Jacob approaching the place with some awe in his heart.

He built his altar there and approached God with a sacrifice. It was for him a moment of worship. He will face Egypt with his heart turned toward God. Is He is not bitter that life as come to this-rather he has an offering of gratitude to bring to the Lord for His goodness upon him and his family. He is especially grateful for the prospect of seeing Joseph again. Learn from this!

2. With Surrender.

We are not told all that the sacrifice represented as Jacob offered it to God. At least it represented the surrender of his life to the God of his father. As he laid the slain animal before the Lord, he was laying his own life out before

the Lord in surrender. Whatever the future might bring, he would face it surrendered to the will of God. Learn from this!

We change comes upon you abruptly and uninvited, instead of become bitter, see it as an invitation to draw near to God. Let it be the occasion of a fresh surrender of life to the will of God.

III. RECOGNIZE THAT SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE.

The move to Egypt did not mean that everything had changed. The terrain might be different, but God was still the same. He might be in a strange nation far from the land that God had given him, but some things were still the same. This is really the primary thing that we are to deduct from the revelation that the Lord gave to him that night.

The vision did come at night in a dream. The voice that he heard was the familiar voice of God saying, "Jacob! Jacob!" The tone of the voice called for a response from Jacob so he answered, "Here I am." The surrender has already been made at the altar so he is ready for whatever God has for him. The things that God says to him mean that some things have not changed.

1. God is still God.

"I am God, the God of your father." God uses the name EI, the God of power. His circumstances are about to change, but His God will be the same God of might in Egypt that he has been in Canaan.

Is this not a wonderful assurance? No change in the circumstances of our lives can change our God! He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Declare it to be so as you face change.

2. God's promises are still true.

God had personally promised to Jacob-and his grandfather and father before him-that he would make him a great nation. Would moving to Egypt cancel this promise? Jacob may have remembered that the Lord had forbidden his father to go to Egypt during a severe famine. He does not want to lose his place in the plan of God. God quiet's his heart when he says, "I will make you into a great nation there." The promise stands!

Instead of canceling the promises of God, the changes will actually be involved in the keeping of the promises of God. The long stay in Egypt will be a part of the faithfulness of God to His promise to Jacob. So the promises of God are not changed when life makes a sudden change.

You will have to remind your heart of this when you feel the pain of change. It time to renew you inner life by feeding upon the promises of God, and reminding God through prayer that you know His promises and that you are sure that He will keep everyone of them.

IV. ANTICIPATE THE SUSTAINING PRESENCE OF GOD.

God has been with him in Haran and in the land of Canaan, but will He still be with him in Egypt. God removes any doubt from Jacob's heart with the assurance-"I will go down into Egypt with you." Who could ask for more? Jacob can face any surprise Egypt may present, if he knows that the sustaining presence of the Lord is with him.

Can't you? I remember some of the last words penned by the beloved Apostle Paul. He writes them from his Roman imprisonment with the reality of death staring him in the face: "At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength." (II Tim. 4: 16-17) Is that not enough? Don't be afraid of the changes that providentially are thrust up on you-the presence of God will sustain you as you go through them.

I have not lived as long as Jacob-not even half as long. But I have lived long enough to know that you can face the changes of life with faith. You do not have to be afraid of the future; Our God will be with us in the future. It is a wonderful witness to the reality of our faith when we face the changes of life without fear.