

Text: Gen. 47:1-12

Title: Having a testimony in a place like Egypt

Time: 9/20/09 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Perhaps no metaphor more adequately describes the life of a believer than *pilgrim*. At the end of his allegorical description of the Christian's pilgrimage in *Pilgrim's Progress*, the Baptist preacher John Bunyan writes a poem that he applies to a character he named Valiant. It is a poem about being a pilgrim:

“Who would true valor see,  
Let him come hither;  
One here will constant be,  
Come wind, come weather.  
There's no discouragement  
Shall make him once relent  
His first avowed intent  
To be a pilgrim.

“Who so beset him round  
With dismal stories,  
Do but themselves confound;  
His strength the more is.  
No lion can him fright,  
He'll with a giant fight,  
But he will have a right  
To be a pilgrim.

“Hobgoblin, nor foul fiend  
Can daunt his spirit;  
He knows, he at the end  
Shall life inherit.  
Then fancies fly away,

He'll fear not what men say;  
He'll labour night and day  
To be a pilgrim."

John Bunyan echoes the words of Jacob in this chapter as he speaks of the life of the believer in terms of a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage is a temporary stay, a journey, a sojourning. The brothers spoke of their stay in Egypt that way (v. 4), but Jacob spoke of his entire life as a pilgrimage or a journey (vv. 9). The stay in Egypt parallels the life of the believer. It is an illustration of our pilgrimage through life.

As the family of Joseph seeks to have a testimony before this land of their sojourning, we need a testimony in the land of ours. I have titled our study this morning, "Having a testimony in places like Egypt." You and I live in a place like Egypt, and we need to have a testimony in this place that pleases the Lord.

I. A testimony in a place like Egypt must be relational (vv. 1-6).

Illustration: I praise the Lord that I was raised in a good Bible-believing church from the second grade on. One of the benefits of having that wonderful experience is that I can look back with appreciation at the example of many families that made a great impression on me and influenced me for the Lord.

One such family was the Crawford family. The Crawfords were hard-working country people who lived on a plant nursery or tree farm they owned about 30 minutes from our church. Mrs. Crawford played the piano for our church, and all five kids loved the Lord and were a great example

to me—I was a bit younger than them all except their youngest girl.

The family impressed me in a couple of ways. First, the kids loved the Lord and went on to Christian college and to serve the Lord in spite of the fact that they went to public school. I was a Christian school kid, and I thought it was pretty remarkable that they could live the life they did while attending a public school.

Second, Mr. Crawford, the father and husband of the family, was an unsaved man in the days I was a kid at that church, yet his attendance at Sunday services was more consistent and faithful than many of the Christians in that church I knew. Eventually, Mr. Crawford trusted Christ as his Savior, and I have to believe that it was the prayers and faithful lives of his wife and kids that the Holy Spirit used to ultimately make the difference.

Application: The Bible tells us He uses our relationships to work in the lives of others this way (1 Pet. 3:1-2, “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear”).

Joseph’s relationship with Pharaoh was the key to his family’s testimony in Egypt. Did you notice that Pharaoh speaks to Joseph, not to the brothers (v. 5)? Without that relationship, there would have been no effective testimony.

We read later on in this passage that Jacob blessed Pharaoh (vv. 7, 10). We need to be a blessing to the Egypt we are sojourning through, and the relationships God has given us

in this world play a huge role in making our testimony effective.

If we were to ask Pharaoh, “Who had been the greatest blessing?”, he would have said Joseph. Joseph’s example teaches us that we have to be faithful in the relationships we have with others before we can be good testimonies to them. We have to be a good neighbor before we can be a good witness to our neighbor; we have to be a good parent before we can be a good witness to our child; we have to be a good employee before we can be a good witness to our boss; we have to be a good vendor before we can be a good witness to our customers.

A testimony in a place like Egypt must be relational. How is your life’s relationships with the world around you a blessing and a testimony to them?

II. A testimony in a place like Egypt must expect to be rare (v. 2).

Application: We are not told why only 5 brothers were chosen to appear before Pharaoh. Some Hebraists take the number 5 as a rounded number meaning “a few.” What we do know is that the text is emphasizing that from the whole number of Joseph’s brothers, he only took 5 or a few. From what we know about the lives of some of Joseph’s brothers, we might speculate that only a few of them could be trusted as good testimonies in Egypt.

The Marines have a motto: “A Few Good Men.” That motto is also a biblical theological theme. Jesus told His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount: “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For

the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

Only very few are saved. The rest call Egypt their home. But even among the few who are saved, sometimes the testimonies for Christ are very hard to find. Testimonies need to be willing to stand alone for the Lord at times. Paul understood this: "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear."

If we are going to be faithful testimonies in Egypt, we must expect to be rare. We too will need to weather the pain of desertion. We too will encounter times we must stand alone.

III. A testimony in a place like Egypt must be humble (vv. 3, 4; "your servants").

Illustration: Americans do not like slavery. We have immortalized the words of our founding fathers in the cause of liberty, like those of Patrick Henry who asked, "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!"

We have seen in the recent news patriots asking the same question about government-run health care. Is that so dear and sweet as to be purchased with a loss of liberty? Patrick Henry would have rather died without health care than to have purchased it with a loss of liberty.

Application: So as Americans, we are not in the habit of calling ourselves another man's slave. And while that attitude may serve us well in the political arena today, because God has given us a representative republic rather than a monarchy run by Pharaoh, the Bible makes clear that *slave* is a term that we should apply to ourselves in a spiritual sense. A testimony in a place like Egypt requires the humility of a slave.

2 Cor. 4:5 puts well what ought to be the attitude of us all in Egypt: "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." The Greek word for *servant* there is *doulos*, from the Greek word *deo* meaning *to bind*. A *doulos* was a slave who was in bondage. Slaves were the lowest class of society. They were humbled people. Have you been humbled? Are you humble? Does the world see humble servitude in your testimony?

IV. A testimony in a place like Egypt must be ready to work hard for a living (vv. 3-4, 6).

Application: This was a major emphasis for us two weeks ago with Labor Day, so I will not belabor the point, but notice that the first question Pharaoh asks the brothers is, "So what do you do for a living?" Earning a living is an important part of a Christian testimony.

Remember what Paul said in 1 Tim. 6:1, "All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against." Hard work is an important part of a God-honoring testimony in Egypt.

V. A testimony in a place like Egypt needs tenure (vv. 7-10).

Application: Jacob's age was the most impressive thing about his testimony when speaking with Pharaoh. Jacob's life had not been perfect, but it had been long and faithful. His testimony was a spiritual blessing to Pharaoh, not in spite of his advanced age, but because of it.

Jacob still had 17 more years to live. How many do you have? We need to use all that we have for a consistent, tenured testimony to the world that brings glory to God. If you have lived a life like that, do not squander your opportunity to have this kind of powerful testimony for Christ by opting for ecclesiastical early-retirement. "Well, I'm too old to have much of a testimony or do much for God anymore." That is a lie from the pit of hell. Because you are older, you can have the mightiest testimony of all.

VI. A testimony in a place like Egypt must demonstrate love for the brotherhood (vv. 11-12; see Gen. 45:11 for the promise that Joseph here fulfills – same word for *nourished* is used).

Application: Here is another theme that we emphasized recently. We saw in chapter 45 that the providence of God, His plan for our lives, calls us to respond with a love for the brotherhood. That was not an easy task for Joseph, but he was faithful at it like he said he would be (Gen. 45:11).

If you are a member of this church, you have covenanted to love the brotherhood here. It is not always going to be easy, but it is critical to your testimony in Egypt. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another." Will people know that you are the disciple of Christ by your love for the brotherhood?

Conclusion: As believers we are on a pilgrimage in a world that is not our home, much like Jacob and his sons so-

journed in Egypt. Hosea 11:1 reminds us of One who had a perfect testimony in Egypt when it says, “[I] called my son out of Egypt.” Matthew’s Gospel records how Jesus’s family brought Him out of Egypt after Herod’s death in fulfillment of that prophecy (Matt. 2:15). Israel was God’s chosen people to represent their Messiah in Egypt and elsewhere in the world.

Today, Christian believers have been given the responsibility of having a testimony on our journey through this foreign place. What will your testimony be in Egypt? To represent Jesus well, it must be relational, willing to be rare, humble, hard-working, tenured, and one of love for the brotherhood. Someday, when we finally make our way home, may we hear the One who was faithful in His journey for us tell us, “Well done, though good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21).

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*