

## SOVEREIGN GRACE PRESERVES GOD'S PEOPLE

### Genesis 46:28—47:12

*Please review this week's catechism question.*

Prayer prompter: One at time, out loud, pray 2 Thessalonians 1: 11-12 for the person on your right.

#### INTRODUCTION

What are some ways you feel pressure from American culture to accommodate and compromise your beliefs or practices as a Christian? Do you have any suspicions about things you believe or do that you presume are Christian but may in fact be merely American cultural values labeled Christian?

The church of Jesus Christ is always on the edge of extinction. We live, as God's people in hostile conditions. The threat of extinction of the church comes mostly through subversion, not coercion. The church isn't conquered by the world, rather we are seduced and we become part of the world. Jesus and the apostle Paul expressed the danger by talking about wolves dressed as sheep, leading the people of God astray. The threat is not that we stop worshipping; it is that we worship a false god while thinking we worship the true God.

Jacob and his family have moved from the Promised Land to Egypt at the command of God to join Joseph in the land of suffering and slavery. This small band of nomadic shepherds is moving into the midst of the greatest nation on earth. It is a powerful, prosperous, proud and pagan nation. The greatest danger facing the people of God in Egypt is not persecution, but assimilation. How will they maintain their distinctiveness as the people of God, ready to return to the land of promise? How will they avoid being seduced by the prosperity and pagan practices of the majority culture? We are going to see how it is that God means to keep them (and us) separate as his chosen people while living in the midst of this seductive culture.

1. Describe in your own words the reunion of Joseph and Jacob (vv. 28-30). How are they feeling?

*It would be hard to imagine a sweeter reunion than the one that takes place between 130-year-old Jacob and his now 40-year-old son Joseph, the prince of Egypt. For twenty-two long years, Jacob has mourned the death of his beloved son. Sorrow has been his daily companion. Despair has often swept over him. He was certain that he was going to die in sorrow, never to be happy again. For twenty-two long years, Joseph has lived away from the comfort of his father. Now they are reunited and they hold each other tightly and weep the sweet tears of joy. This is the same emotion felt by Mr. and Mrs. Smart and their daughter Elizabeth after she was returned safe nine months after being abducted from her home at knifepoint.*

2. Notice in v. 29 that Joseph "appeared" to his father Jacob. Read Genesis 12:7, 17:1, 18:1, 26:2, 26:24 & 35:1. Why would Moses, the narrator, use this word (see 1 Peter 1:10-12)?

*There is more here than the joy of a long separated father and son. We have seen the sufferings and glory of Jesus in the life of Joseph. In this passage, Moses, the narrator of the story inserts a little word to tip us off to something greater that is happening here. )". The word "appeared" is an odd word to use. It is the word that is used each time the Lord appears to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He appeared to Abraham in Genesis 18 when he promised the birth of Isaac. He appeared to Isaac to tell him not to go to Egypt in Genesis 26 and then at Beersheba to assure him of his presence and blessing. Moses wants us to see, in the appearance of Joseph to Jacob, the glory and love of God for his people.*

3. How would Joseph have "appeared" to Jacob? What does Jacob say when he sees Joseph and what does it mean?

*He appeared riding in the royal chariot surrounded by his royal attendants, dressed in his royal finery. He appeared to him as the glorious prince, ruler of all Egypt. He appeared to him as the object of his love, desire and affection. Joseph appeared to Jacob as the fulfillment of all his dreams and desires for happiness. He says that now he can die happy. He has everything he needs to be happy in the presence of his son. Earth has nothing he desires except Joseph. He considers everything else in his life a loss compared to being with Joseph. He has given up his life in Canaan to be with Joseph. This*

suffering, royal son appears to him as the all-satisfying object of his love.

4. How does this compare to how Jesus “appears” to Christians?

*This is the picture of conversion, of what faith in Jesus Christ is. The primary work of God in your life is to reveal Christ to you in such a way that you desire him and are satisfied with him. God wants all other pleasures to appear as nothing compared to the surpassing pleasure of knowing Christ Jesus. The primary way God preserves his church and preserves each member of his church is to cause Jesus to appear to us as the glorious, suffering king. God is working to show how sufficient Jesus is for your eternal happiness. How wrong would it be for Jacob to be indifferent to Joseph? How wrong it is for you and I to not be taken up with Jesus. There is no one like him. He is better than wealth. He is better than a good marriage. He is better than hanging out at the mall with your friends. He is better than the new movie. He is better than sex. He is better than vacations. He is better than not being hassled by your siblings. He is better than everything.*

5. Does Jesus appear to you as better than every other pleasure in the world? Why or why not?

**God, through Jesus, preserves his people while we live in an alien world by revealing his glory to us.**

6. In 46:30-33 what is the main thing that Joseph wants his brothers to stress to Pharaoh when they meet him?

*Joseph tells his brothers that when they appear before Pharaoh and he asks them what is their occupation, they are to tell Pharaoh that they are shepherds. He wants them to tell Pharaoh this because Egyptians detest nomadic shepherds. Think about what he is saying. “I want you to tell this powerful man that you are what he detests.” Joseph wants them to tell Pharaoh the thing that Pharaoh will find most offensive about them. He promises them that if they will inform Pharaoh that they are shepherds, then Pharaoh will give them the land of Goshen in which to live.*

7. Why does he want them to do this, especially when we know that Pharaoh is very favorable towards Joseph’s family and already wants to give them the best land in Egypt (45:17-18)? (NOTE: Goshen is the region on the eastern edge of Egypt in the fertile plains of the Nile River Delta.) Read Deuteronomy 7: 3-4 for a clue.

*We know that Pharaoh is favorably disposed towards Joseph and his family. However, immigrants do not get to tell the king where they want to live. The king is the one who assigns the immigrants to the place where he wants them to live. Joseph knows that if his family lives in the center of Egyptian power and worship, where he lives, it will not be long before they are assimilated into Egyptian culture or enslaved as a minority and lose their distinction as the people of God. He doesn’t want his family intermarrying with the Egyptians and joining in the worship of their pagan gods. He wants to provide for his family, yet he wants to keep them separate from the pagan Egyptians. He believes that Goshen, the fertile land on the edge of Egypt would be the perfect place for his family to live and flourish and to be separate from the Egyptians. He wants Pharaoh to be favorable but not to want to keep his family close.*

8. What is it that the non-Christian world “detests” about the church of Jesus Christ? See John 15:18-20, Acts 4:18, 5:27-33 & 1 Corinthians 1: 22-23.

*What makes us distinct is the gospel of Jesus Christ. What the world despises is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we must always make plain the gospel.*

9. Why must we emphasize the gospel?

*It is only by emphasizing the unique, one of a kind gospel that we will avoid being absorbed by the culture in which we live. If we do not emphasize the gospel we will become like the world, even though we may remain “religious.” If we emphasize this gospel, we can count on being despised by the world. Yet only by stressing these things can we count on being kept safe. If we stress these things, the world will hate us but we will make it safely to our eternal home. It is by accentuating the gospel in all of its uniqueness and offensiveness that our children and we will be kept safe.*

**10.** What truths will we be emphasizing if we are emphasizing the gospel?

*We must emphasize human sinfulness. We must emphasize God's hatred of human sinfulness and his righteous judgment against humans. We must stress the unique nature of the only God who exists. He is the creator and sustainer of all creation. He is the sovereign king of the universe whose purposes always prevail. He is the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We must accentuate the absolute authority and truthfulness of God's word and of his commands. We must emphasize human inability to satisfy the demands of God or to do anything to earn or gain God's favor. We must highlight that there is salvation to be found nowhere except in the crucified and risen God-man Jesus Christ. All other gods are false gods. All other salvations are a false hope.*

**11.** Do your non-Christian friends and family know what it is that sets you apart from them?

**12.** Are we as a church emphasizing the gospel enough?

**God, through Jesus, preserves his people while we live in an alien world by keeping us separate from the world.**

**13.** Genesis 47: 7-10 recounts the meeting of Jacob with Pharaoh. Compare and contrast the “worldly” position of these two men. What would strike you about the two men if you were to have observed this meeting?

*Here we have this chief of a small, nomadic tribe of shepherds appearing before the most powerful man on earth at the time. Jacob comes into the presence of all that the world reveres and wars to own. He comes as the despised member of an insignificant minority people. Jacob, dressed in his best homespun robe, walks into the royal court of Pharaoh surrounded by dozens of attendants, seated upon his regal throne, adorned with the finest clothing available. The room sparkles with jewelry and glints with gold. Powerful men with massive spears stand guard all around. Beautiful women attend to every whim. It would appear that Jacob is significantly inferior to Pharaoh in every way.*

**14.** What is the first thing that happens when Jacob comes into Pharaoh's presence? How does this strike you? Why does Jacob do this and what does it indicate about their relationship that Pharaoh permits him to do it?

*Jacob walks up to this most powerful man and blesses him. He declares God's favor upon Pharaoh and his people. What he says is something like this: “May the God of my fathers, the Almighty creator of heaven and earth, of the sun, moon and stars, who alone dwells in unapproachable light bless you. May he show his favor to you and look upon you with kindness. May he turn his fierce anger away from you and give you his peace.” Talk about presumption! What does Pharaoh need that he does not already possess? What greater blessing is he lacking? Who does this despised, insignificant man think he is? What right does he have to invoke the name of his God in a room that is dedicated to and decorated with the great sun God, Ra? Jacob knows that in spite of all this wealth, this man and this kingdom can only flourish if God ordains to bless. What this man who possesses all that the world pursues needs is God and his blessing. Jacob comes in the name of God and offers the world what the world needs the most and cannot obtain except through him, God as Savior. The fact that Pharaoh permits Jacob to do this shows that he understands who is the greater person.*

**15.** When Pharaoh asks Jacob how old he is Jacob replies (Literal translation), “The years of my sojourning (living as a foreigner in a foreign land) have been 130. The years of my life have been few and evil and they do not equal the years of the sojourning of my fathers.” What is Jacob saying about himself and his view of life by answering this way?

*First, he is humble. His years are few compared to the age of his fathers Isaac and Abraham who lived to be 175 and 170 respectfully. Second, his life has been one full of evil. His life has been the opposite of Pharaoh's life. Whereas Pharaoh's life has been full of the pleasures of this life, Jacob's life has been full of evil, of suffering. Here he is, representing God. He is God's servant and yet his life has been one of suffering. Then he says twice that his life and the life of his fathers have been lives of pilgrimage or sojourning. In other words, he has lived for*

*130 years without a home, as a stranger on planet earth. The writer to the Hebrews describes this event in 11:13. "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth." He is not lamenting his condition, he is rejoicing in it. He is exhibiting to Pharaoh the source of his contentment. His life is but a brief span and full of evil. He has never had a home but has always been on pilgrimage and yet he is happy and content because he is living for another world. Jacob is explaining to Pharaoh the purpose of life. We are to live for another world. We are to live in this world but not to make full use of it, as if this is where our lives are permanently made.*

**16.** How are we to "bless" the non-Christian's that we live among? What is Jacob modeling for us?

*God wants to bless the unbelieving world through us. However, he is not going to do it by us trying to become like them. He will do it as we live on this earth as though we are aliens in a foreign land. He will do it as we embrace the suffering that every follower of Christ must embrace. He will do it by our courageously and compassionately blessing the world in the name of Jesus. What the world needs is a Savior. We bless the world by telling them the gospel. We can only help the world find that Savior if we will determine to remain a distinct people who bless the world by our suffering love for them and our courageous proclamation of the blessing of God which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Your unbelieving friends and family need to see what it looks like when people live as if this world is not their home. The most powerful testimony to the sufficiency of Christ is people who live in joy when they lose what the world considers important. The world will take notice of Christ when Christ's people endure loss for the sake of loving one another and the people we live among.*

**17.** Do you view your relationships with your non-believing friends as God's placing you with them to bless them by telling them the gospel and loving them for Jesus' sake?

**God, through Jesus, preserves his people while we live in an alien world by blessing the world through us.**

**18.** What do vv. 11-12 tell us?

*Joseph settles his father and brothers and their families in the best land in Egypt, the land of Goshen (The region of Rameses as v. 11 says.). He then provides them with all the food they need to survive the famine that still has five more years to go. He does exactly what he promised them he would do in 45: 9-13.*

**19.** What has Jesus promised to his people, who live as sojourners in the land of suffering and slavery, according to Matthew 6: 25-34? How does this promise keep us from being assimilated by the world?

*God preserves us from being overwhelmed by the world by promising to give us everything we need to make it safely to his heavenly kingdom. We do not need to worry or fear the loss of money or possessions. We do not need to run after these things like the pagan world we live in. We can be free to give our lives away in suffering love without fear that somehow our giving will outstrip the resources of God. I'm not just talking about giving money. The thing that keeps us from taking risks of love, of giving ourselves and our resources away, is fear that we will not be cared for. Jesus promises to provide all that we need to gain what is most important, his kingdom. He does not promise a safe, middle-class life in the US. He does promise that he will provide everything you and I need to make it safely to our heavenly home. You cannot be harmed, even if you lose all of your earthly possessions. You really can leave behind your life in the land of Canaan and come be near your suffering but now glorified brother in the land of suffering and slavery so he can take care of you. He is better than everything and he promises to provide you with everything you need to make it safely to your heavenly home.*

**20.** What are some ways your view and use of money and possessions shows that you are not pursuing what the pagan world pursues?

**God, through Jesus, preserves his people while we live in an alien world by giving us all we need to live in the world.**