

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver St.
Flagstaff, AZ 86001

EXPERIENCING GOD'S PROVISION

Genesis 45:16-28

by

Steven J. Cole

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Genesis Lesson 76

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Genesis 45:16-28

An old woodsman decided to go modern and buy his first chain saw. He had used an axe all his life, but he kept hearing that these chain saws could cut a cord of wood in a fraction of the time he could do it with his axe. So he went to the store and bought the top model.

But a few days later he came back and complained to the sales clerk that his saw wasn't any good. He said, "I can cut more wood with my axe than I can with this thing." The clerk looked the saw over carefully. He checked the oil level, he examined the chain to make sure it was secure, he looked at the spark plug. Everything seemed okay, so he pulled the starter cord and the saw roared to life. The old woodsman jumped back in alarm and exclaimed, "What's that noise?"

The old woodsman had all the power he needed in that saw, but he couldn't use it because he didn't realize that it was available and he didn't know how to use it. Many Christians are like that. God has provided "everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3), but they don't experience it because of hindrances in their lives.

Perhaps some of you desperately need something from the Lord. It may be a financial need, a physical need, a need for healing in some relationship, or a spiritual need. God may have withheld it simply because it is not His time or because He knows that ultimately it would not be good for you. He may want you to learn His sufficiency in your weakness. But He may not be providing it because something in your life is blocking it.

As we saw in our last study, Genesis 45:16-28 is a beautiful illustration of God's abundant provision for His people. Through Joseph, God provided abundantly beyond what Jacob and his other

sons ever could have expected. We saw how God provided for all their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, in His timing, not theirs, in ways they never would have expected, and through grace, not through merit. I want to look at these verses again to point out some things that could have hindered Jacob and his sons from experiencing God's provision through Joseph and to see how we can experience God's abundant provision for us in Christ.

To experience God's provision, we must remove any hindrances and look beyond the gifts to the Giver.

1. To experience God's provision, we must remove any hindrances.

Our text reveals five hindrances that can keep us from experiencing God's provision:

- A. Quarreling can hinder us from experiencing God's provision.

As his brothers are about to depart, Joseph warns them, "Do not quarrel on the journey" (45:24). Why would Joseph say this to his brothers? Because he knew them and he knew human nature. These men had become instantly rich. They went down to Egypt as shepherds, hoping to buy enough bread to survive the famine. They returned with wagon loads of provisions, dressed in the finest clothes of Egypt, with the promise of all they needed for the future.

Whenever people get money, they can easily get greedy, especially when one gets more than another. Benjamin, Joseph's full brother, received five changes of clothes and 300 pieces of silver. The other brothers easily could have said, "This isn't fair. Let's kill Benjamin and take his things for ourselves." Or they could have pressured Benjamin into dividing his things among them. Quarreling on the way home was a danger that could

have resulted in their never returning to experience all that Joseph had to give them.

Even though Joseph's admonition strikes us as humorous, there is a warning here for us who are brothers and sisters in the Lord. It's easy to envy the possessions or the situation in life of other Christians who have more than we have. It can lead to quarrels and block us from experiencing what God wants to give us.

Often such quarrels are between family members, as was the danger here. Childhood sibling rivalry carries over into adult life. Just watch a family scramble for their share of the inheritance when the parents die. There are brothers and sisters who don't even talk to one another for years because they're angry about who got what after their parents died.

I chuckle when I read Luke 12:13-15, where a man in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." I would think that Jesus, being fair, would have said, "Bring the scoundrel to me," and would have rebuked him for his greed. But instead, Jesus said to the man with the complaint, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbiter over you?" And then He pointedly warned him and the whole crowd, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." It wasn't just the brother who grabbed the inheritance who had a problem with greed. The brother who wanted his fair share also was greedy, and it led to this ongoing quarrel. Quarreling, especially because we're greedy, can hinder us from experiencing God's provision.

- B. Guilt can hinder us from experiencing God's provision.

When Joseph told his brothers to go home and tell his

father about his splendor in Egypt and to bring him and all their households down there, it meant that they would have to admit to their father how they sold Joseph into slavery and deceived Jacob all these years. This also could have led to quarreling on the way home, as Reuben could have said, "I told you not to do it" (42:22), and Judah said, "Remember, I'm the guy who saved Joseph's life when the rest of you wanted to kill him."

What if the brothers had decided, "We can't tell dad the truth about Joseph"? What if they had not been willing to admit their sin to their father? They would have missed all that Joseph wanted to provide for them in Egypt. Experiencing Joseph's provision hinged on their willingness to confess their sin. Otherwise, their guilt would have hindered them from the many good things Joseph wanted to give them.

In the same way, guilt can keep us from experiencing what God has provided for us in Christ. When you've wronged someone and feel guilty, do you want to be around them? Of course not! If you see them coming, you duck the other way and hope that they didn't see you. And if you feel that way toward God, you try to hide from Him, like Adam and Eve in the garden. But you can't receive what God wants to give you when you're hiding from Him. The only way to experience His abundant blessings is to confess all your sin, knowing that He is faithful and righteous to forgive your sin, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

C. Doubt can hinder us from experiencing God's provision.

Jacob's sons returned home and said, "Joseph is alive and is ruler of all Egypt!" And Jacob said, "Praise God! That's great news!" No, Jacob "was stunned, for he did not believe them" (45:26). I can understand why the old

man would be inclined to doubt them. After all, Jacob's sons didn't have a great track record for honesty. But what if Jacob had continued to doubt them? What if he had said, "You're up to no good, as usual! You know that Joseph died over 20 years ago, and now you expect me to believe that he is alive and well?" If Jacob had continued to doubt, he would have missed God's abundant provision through Joseph.

Apart from the previous unreliability of Jacob's sons, why did he doubt their words? There are three reasons. (I'm indebted here to Charles Simeon, *Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible* [Zondervan, 1956], 1:292-294.)

First, Jacob doubted his sons because what they said was *contrary to everything he had believed* for the past 22 years. For all those years he had thought, "Joseph is dead ... Joseph is dead." The news, Joseph is alive didn't fit into his grid. He had programmed himself to think in a certain way, so he couldn't accept this contrary idea as true.

Isn't that just like some people who reject the gospel? For years they have believed a set of false propositions concerning God and the Bible. They have thought, "The Bible is just a bunch of myths. Science tells us that evolution is true. How can anyone believe in miracles?" They have believed this way for so long that these things have become fixed assumptions in their minds. So when a Christian comes along and says, "There is a God who created the universe and you can know Him through the risen Lord Jesus Christ," they scoff. What they're really saying is, "It can't be true, because I have believed differently for so long."

Second, Jacob doubted his sons' report because *it sounded too good to be true*. Joseph alive? That would have been the best thing Jacob could have imagined. But after all, this is the real world, not a fairy story. Everyone doesn't live

happily ever after in real life. Joseph had died; how could he possibly be alive, let alone be ruler of Egypt? In spite of all the evidence to the contrary (which we'll consider in a moment), Jacob couldn't believe it. It was just too good to be true!

Many reject the gospel for the same reason. It's just too good to be true. If you tell people that the way to God is to try harder and resolve to be a better person, so that through determination and good works, you'll get to heaven, they'll believe you. That's what every cult teaches, and people flock to them. But if you say, "God has provided everything through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. All you can do is come to God just as you are and accept the free gift of eternal life He offers you," people say, "It can't be! That's just too good to be true."

But it is true! The good news is that Christ died for our sins. He paid the penalty we deserve. God has done it all. No matter how great your sins, all you can do is come to Christ just as you are and receive His forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift.

The third reason for Jacob's doubt was his *tendency to believe the bad news above the good news*. Jacob, the perpetual pessimist, was more inclined to believe that all these things were against him than to believe that God was for him. When he sent his sons to Egypt, he was sure that he would never see any of them again. He was always looking for and believing the worst case scenario.

Some of us are more inclined to pessimism than others. But pessimism isn't compatible with faith in our good God. We put up our umbrellas of gloom to block out His sunshine and then complain about how shady it is! Satan's original strategy with Eve was to get her to doubt the goodness of God. He still uses that ploy to keep many from experiencing all that God has for them.

- D. Difficulties can hinder us from experiencing God's provision.

Jacob was an old man. There were no commuter flights or even paved roads between Canaan and Egypt. To make this move to Egypt with all his household was a major thing for a man Jacob's age. It meant a new, threatening living situation in a foreign country. There were all his belongings to pack and transport. There was a lot of uncertainty, risk, inconvenience, and hardship involved in this move. But if Jacob had allowed these difficulties to hinder him, he would have missed all that Joseph wanted to provide.

Change isn't easy, especially the older we get. It's easier to stay set in our ways, enjoying our familiar surroundings. But we can miss the blessings God wants to give us because we refuse to go through the difficulties involved in changing ourselves or our geographic location. If God says, "Go to the mission field" and I say, "Lord, I'm too old. It's too hard for me to change at this point in life," I'll not experience His full provision for my life.

Sometimes our possessions become a difficulty in disguise which keep us from experiencing God's better provision. The King James Bible translates verse 20, "Regard not your stuff." Pharaoh is telling Jacob's brothers not to worry about bringing all their things, since he will provide them with the best of the land.

Suppose God says to me, "I want you to go serve Me in China" and I reply, "But, God, I can't do that. What would I do with all my stuff?" My stuff would be keeping me from God's will for my life, which would hinder me from experiencing His abundant provision. I never want to be so tied to my stuff that it keeps me

from obeying God. Sell the stuff! If God wants me in China, I'd be happier there without all my stuff than I would be in America with it. Finally,

- E. Despair can hinder us from experiencing God's provision.

Jacob was at a low point when the news of Joseph reached him. He had sent his sons off with the fatalistic comment, "If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved" (43:14). As far as Jacob was concerned, Joseph was dead, Simeon was probably dead, and he may never see Benjamin again. In fact, the others may never return and he and the rest of the family might starve to death. As I said last week, the word used to translate "revived" (45:27) in the Greek Old Testament is used of stirring up dying embers which are almost extinguished. Jacob's spirit was almost gone. But if he had persisted in his despair, he would have missed God's provision through Joseph.

I realize that some people are more prone to depression because of their brain chemistry. They may need medical help. But I'm convinced that much depression is due to wrong thinking about the things that happen to us in life. When disappointing things happen to us, we have a choice about how we process it. We can think the worst, that God has forgotten us, that everything is against us. Or, we can choose to believe God. We can look at the evidence of His faithfulness and we can look to the Lord Himself and say, "It is not true that God has forgotten me. He cares about me." Thinking those thoughts, we then can seek the Lord and we will experience all that He wants to give us.

Jacob did that here. He heard the testimony of his sons. He heard what Joseph had said. He looked at the gifts which Joseph had sent. And his spirit revived, so that his

consuming purpose in life now was to go and see Joseph. In the same way, once we have dealt with the hindrances of quarreling, guilt, doubt, difficulties, and despair,

2. To experience God's provision, we must look beyond the gifts to the Giver.
 - A. Look to the evidence of His faithfulness.

What changed Jacob's despair into hope? Three things: First, he heard the *eyewitness testimony* of his sons (45:26); then, he heard *the words of Joseph* (45:27); finally, he saw *the wagons* that Joseph had sent to carry him (45:27). Those tangible evidences changed Jacob's doubt to faith, so that he was able to experience the abundance which Joseph wanted to provide for him.

Perhaps today you're doubting God. Circumstances have overwhelmed you with despair. You say, "I'd like to believe what you say, that God wants to provide for all my needs. But so many terrible things have happened to me. I just can't believe in God." But God offers you the same evidence of His faithfulness which He gave to Jacob.

First, there is the *eyewitness testimony* of those who were with the risen Savior. The apostle John was one of them. He wrote (1 John 1:1-4):

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life--and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us--what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us;

and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

John and the other New Testament writers were intimately acquainted with Jesus Christ. They saw Him and spent time with Him after His resurrection. You can believe what they tell you. But maybe, like Jacob with his sons, you have trouble believing at this level.

Then look to the second level: *The words of Jesus Himself*. Jacob's sons reported to him all that Joseph said. They told how Joseph recounted the providence of God in all that had happened to him. They related the kind words which Joseph had spoken of his father. As Jacob heard these things, he thought, "That sounds just like Joseph." The words had the ring of truth.

The New Testament, especially the Gospels, report to us many of the words of Jesus. Read them and see if they don't have the ring of truth. Surely, no one could invent such a character in fiction. Jesus tells us about God as One who had been with the Father. He speaks wise words of grace and truth which penetrate to the very core issues of life. If you are doubting God, read the words of Jesus.

Third, there are *the visible evidences of Christ's faithfulness* to you. After Jacob heard his sons and the words of Joseph, he saw the wagons full of provisions (45:27). And if you will look, you will see abundant evidence of God's care for you. Look at your possessions. You have food and clothing, plus many luxuries. Look at the family and friends He has given you. If you say, "But my family has rejected me and treated me terribly," I say to you, "Look around this church. Here is your family, brothers and sisters who love you and care for you."

Look at your health. Perhaps you are ill or even dying. But God has given you life for these years. Life itself is an evidence of His mercy. And even now, He is giving you the opportunity to respond to His love, to receive the gift of eternal life which He provided for you at great cost to Himself. Every good and perfect gift comes down to us from God.

But Jacob didn't say, "Look at these wagons! Look at all this stuff! This is great!" He didn't even mention the gifts. Instead, when he believed that Joseph was alive, that was enough. Forget the gifts; Jacob wanted only to go and see Joseph. Even so, we should never become enamored with the gifts God provides as evidence of His faithfulness. Rather, we should ...

B. Look to the Lord Himself.

All Jacob wanted in life now was to go and see Joseph. I'm sure he appreciated and used the provisions Joseph had supplied. But Jacob's consuming passion in life now was to see his son who had "died" and now was alive again.

God's purpose in providing for us is not that we would get caught up with His provisions or gifts. God wants us to be enamored with His Son, who died and is alive forevermore. Look to the gifts God gives as evidence of His faithfulness, but remember, they're only a means of getting us to look beyond to the face of the Giver. Our consuming passion in life should be to see Christ and be with Him.

CONCLUSION

A wealthy man once lost his wife when their only child was young. He hired a housekeeper to care for the boy, who lived only into his teens. Heartbroken from this second loss, the father died a short

time later. No will could be found. Since there were no relatives, it looked as if the state would get his fortune.

The man's personal belongings, including his mansion, were put up for sale. The old housekeeper had little money, but there was one thing she wanted. It was a picture that had hung on a wall in the house--a photo of the boy she had loved and cared for. When the items were sold, nobody else wanted the picture, so she bought it for just a few cents. Taking it home, she began to clean it and polish the glass. As she took it apart, a paper fell out. It was the man's will, and in it he stated that all his wealth should go to the one who loved his son enough to buy that picture. ("Our Daily Bread," Summer, 1983.)

God's abundant resources belong to all who trust and love His Son. The promises of God are all yes in Christ. If you've never come to Him, put aside any hindrances, look at the evidence of His faithfulness in your life and in His Word, and look beyond to the person of Christ Himself. Trust in Him and you will experience God's provision for all your needs.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is greed is a major or minor problem for American Christians? How can we deal with it in ourselves and in our children in this materialistic culture?
2. What are some bench marks by which we can gauge whether we are too caught up with our stuff and not enough with Christ?
3. How can a pessimist become an optimist? Should he?
4. How can a person who has suffered many hardships honestly believe in the goodness of God?

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