

Finishing the Course

Jacob's Life

II Timothy 4:7-8: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

Philippians 1:3,6: "I thank my God in all of my remembrance of you...For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

Genesis 33:17-19: This is after Jacob had wrestled with the angel at Peniel. Then he met Esau where he and Esau had split ways.

"Jacob journeyed to Succoth and built for himself a house and made booths for his livestock; therefore the place is named Succoth. Now Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram, and camped before the city. He bought the piece of land where he had pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money."

Genesis 35:1: "Then God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel and live there, and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.'"

Let's pray:

Our Father, we are grateful that we are in Your presence by the blood of Jesus Christ, and because we are in Him we are fully accepted by You. Father, we come today wanting to see You; we do not want a teaching, we want to see You. We want You to reveal Yourself to our hearts so that we can walk in this world as Your children. We want to see this morning, Lord, we pray You will reveal to us the God of Jacob in all His glory. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Finishing the Race

The last time I spoke I kind of piggybacked on what Jerry Aman spoke, and I am going to kind of do that again because that thought has been on my heart too about finishing the course—not finishing the race. There is a difference. A course spans everything; it is not like I am running to win a race; I am running to finish. It is like some of us old ones if we go to a 10K run; we do not run to win, we run to finish because we are old. I am old now. When I was young, I never thought of being a senior citizen. It was never in my thoughts, but I wonder what it is going to be like when I am seventy. Whoever thought of reaching seventy. We thought we would be perennially in our twenties. We never thought we would be beyond that, but here we are. As we come to these days, it is like sometimes I am not one who looks at myself as being a champion. I see all my flaws, and I am discouraged so much by who I am in my flesh. Sometimes I feel like when do I quit dragging him around? I think maybe it is because I am getting old, and I am starting to think about finishing the course. And I look at Paul when he writes this. How could he so confidently say, "I have finished the course"? That to me is just hard to fathom, to have so much confidence that he

could say before Timothy his disciple and even before the Lord, "I finished the course." And then how could he say to the Philippians, "I am confident that you will finish the course"? How could he say that? How could he say that with such confidence?

When Jerry was speaking, he talked about being all in. I never see myself as being all in because I know I will go so far; it is my history. I go so far and then I stop. What hope is there for me? How could Paul have a confidence and say, "Jim, I am confident that He who began a good work will finish it the day of Christ Jesus." He does not see me, but the one thing He does see is His God. He begins II Timothy in chapter 1:12: "For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed."

So this morning I would like to talk about one who finished the race. Because when I look at Paul and go, "He has got such a wonderful Christian walk." What hope is there for us who do not have a wonderful Christian walk?

Just before I get into this, in my neighborhood I like to sit out on my front porch and sit in my rocking chair. I was looking at the trees here, and all of the trees are perpendicular. Branches grow out from the trunks and they are perpendicular. In my neighbor's yard, they have two trees that are side by side. One goes straight up, and next to it there is another tree. This tree started growing up from the trunk one way, then it grew another way, and it began to curve up, and I marvel at it. How is that tree able to stand? And why is that tree like that? All the other trees are going straight up; what is wrong with this tree? I thought because all plants grow toward the light so it caused this tree to do all this squiggly stuff. I think it was overshadowed by this other tree because it was trying to get to the light, and it grew one way and then formed another way. But the whole thing is that it is as tall as the other tree. They are side by side, and the interesting thing is that is the one I am drawn to; there is an artistic bend in me. If I was drawing, it is boring to draw things straight up and down, but if you get something with shape it has character. But the whole thing is that it is right alongside one that is growing straight and tall, and it is reaching the same area. Its top branches are even with the top branches of the other tree, and it just makes me marvel. When I think of the Christian life, how I wish that my Christian life was like that perpendicular tree. You know, we always wish that we would have that meeting with the Lord that changes us forever, and we never, never fall again. I do not know about you but that is me. When am I going to have that aha moment? I look at this tree and this tree had several aha moments which shaped it, but it still reached the sunlight. How did that happen?

So when I want to look at finishing the course, I do not want to look at Paul as great as he is. He is a wonderful man in Christ, but he is too perfect for me. I do not want to look at Moses because he is the same way. I do not want to look at Abraham, he is the same way. I do not want to look at David, He is the same. So God gave us one for us to feel we are just going to make it, and He gave us Jacob. More than any other name, God goes by the name, "God of Jacob."

My daughter Jamie and I were talking last night as we were waiting for the baby to go to sleep. As we were talking she asked me what I was speaking on tomorrow, and I said that I was speaking on Jacob. "Why Jacob? There is nothing loveable in him. Compared to Abraham what does this say? I do not see anything in Jacob." And I said, "Maybe that is why God is called the God of Jacob because there is nothing lovely in him, and yet he is redeemed."

My favorite verse in Isaiah 43:1: "I called you by name. I have redeemed you." Isn't it wonderful to think that He redeems the unlovely? He does not just redeem a Paul or a Peter or an Abraham. He redeems a Jacob. So I would like to speak concerning finishing the course on Jacob.

Mac shared last week a quote from T. Austin Sparks, and it really caught me. He talked about being an overcomer, and an overcomer is not someone who is so strong and mighty. It is that at the end we find ourselves in the will of God. That to me is just a wonderful saying. It does not matter where you started or where you have gotten hung up. In the end, if you are in the will of God you have overcome. You have overcome by God because He has brought you into His will.

The Calling of God

I think when we finally come to the end, we find the same thing with Jacob. When we come to chapter 33, Jacob is not in the will of God. He was called back to Bethel, but he is in Succoth, then he is in Shechem. He is going everywhere else, but he is not going to the place where he is supposed to be. He is out of the will of God, but it is wonderful to know that it was not Jacob who was trying to be disobedient. There is something about God who is faithful to the one He calls. It is not just that we are faithful to His call because we fall, but isn't it wonderful that the God of Jacob is faithful to what God has called and what He has purposed.

Remember David Peng, who gave us a little timeline the last time we had our conference, and he showed how after the exile he had the things of Israel that were going down, but the purpose of God kept constant. And the whole thing is that God never changes. We change all the time, but God doesn't. He is faithful all the way through, and that is why Paul is confident for other people because, "I know my God." And that is not to say, "Oh, okay, I can just relax," but for God to be faithful in keeping His saying, He always looks for a response from us. But it is a response at the moment that He calls us. A lot of times we respond to things, and He is not really calling us.

I remember one time that Jerry and I were in a prison ministry that God never called us into, and it was miserable. I do not think one person got saved, and it was miserable; we hated going through it. God did not call us to do that because if we had been called to it, do you think there would have been no conversions? No, if He had called us, He would have been doing His work. But He never called us to do that; it was His way of saying, "I did not call you to do that. I called you for something else."

Jacob is like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress. He comes in, he gets the promise from the Lord, "I am giving you the blessings of Abraham." Then he goes up to Paddan Aram with Laban. And like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress, he gets to the wicked gate and then comes to all sorts of crossroads in his life. He winds up going down some of the wrong roads. He goes up the hill of Galilee and the road that leads into Vanity Fair. All these things happened to him and slowed him up from getting to this Celestial City which was His goal, his purpose. He wanted to get to the Celestial City, and he took side roads here and there. Does that mean because he takes the side road he does not get there? No, because there is Someone watching over him. There is Someone saying, "I paid so much for you; I cannot let you wander around forever. I must bring you to Myself

because of the price I paid for you, and the price I paid for you was not gold and silver. It was the precious blood of My Son, and because of that I cannot turn My back on you. I cannot say to you, "You are a lost cause." No! He can only say to us, "Because of My Son, you are My beloved, and I cannot turn My back." Can a mother turn her back on her nursing child? Or fail to have compassion on him? "She may forget, but know it or not, Israel, I will never forget you." That is the word of the Lord to Israel. Israel is the name that was given to Jacob.

So when we look at these things and we think about Jacob's life in chapter 33. I have already talked about it in a little way because as we go through our lives, life does not always turn out like we planned it. We go different paths, taken different ways, sometimes we find ourselves in prison by our own wanderings away, and the Lord has to break us out of those prisons. Sometimes we find ourselves caught in the world, and the Lord has to break us out.

It was the same with Jacob. He wanted to settle down and build himself a house; he liked the wealth of the world. He went to Shechem, and he wanted the culture of the world. All through this the Lord was not condemning him or anything. He is waiting for him. I think he just got tired. You know something this is not just making it. I do not even know I set up these booths for these cattle. He goes to Shechem and he is compromising the whole purpose of God in Shechem. He married his daughter off and everything like that. Thank God for His unruly sons who go in there and say, "Not until you are circumcised will we give our daughters to you." And then when he goes, he murdered them. Then we say, "Thank God they murdered them."

God Speaks to Us Where We Are

Finally, God spoke to him. I want to just make this point clear. God spoke to him where he was. He did not have to come out of something for God to speak to him, but God spoke to him right where he was. And it was speaking that response to God that brought him out of where he was, and this is the wonderful thing about our God. God speaks to us where we are. After we got converted, how many times have we known it in our Christian walk God speaking to us where we are? He does not go, "You need to fix this, and then we will talk." He comes to us where we are.

And He came to Jacob where he was, and notice what he said to him in chapter 35:1: "Arise." Get up, just get up. It is like the paralytic in John chapter 5:6 who had been there for thirty-eight years, And Jesus asked him, "Do you want to be made well?" That is the kind of thing like, "Well, that is a stupid question." "Do you want to be made well." Then we give our excuses. "Oh, no one is here to do this. Oh, if it wasn't for this, if it wasn't for that." And the Lord Jesus is listening, but He interrupts him and says, "Stand up! Arise, take up your bed and go home." And that is what he says to Jacob, "Arise, take up your bed and go home. Your home is Bethel. That is where I want you. I want you to go up to Bethel, and I want you to live there, and I want you to build an altar." He had just built an altar in Shechem; he called it El Elohe Israel, the God of Israel. But God said, "I am not satisfied with that altar, that is not the altar I am seeking. I am seeking something else."

So when the Lord starts with Jacob in chapter 35, He did not say, "Okay Jacob, that was just warm-ups. I am going to give you a do-over." God does not give do-overs. He picks us up where we are. There are consequences to things that we have to face. He does not wash away the consequences of sin. He washes away the penalty, but there are consequences. For example, I

know that Tex Watson, the murderer in the Manson murders got saved while he was in prison, but did that mean he was absolved of the crime that he committed when he was unsaved? No, he is serving a life sentence without parole. There was consequence to that sin, but will we see him in glory? Amen, we are going to see this one changed by Christ.

So He said, "Arise, do not bemoan where you are. I am not asking you to regret, I am not calling you to do that. I am calling you to come home." It is like the prodigal who came home and said, "I have done this, and I will do anything." And the father almost does not hear his son. So here is Jacob and the Lord says, "Do not bemoan the fact of where you are; I know you are there. And I know why you are there. I am not dealing with that. I am dealing with you. Get up, go to Bethel, live there, and make an altar to Me there."

Jacob's Call to Bethel

Why Bethel? This is the first step of finishing the course. When we get sidetracked, we get back on course. Why Bethel? Bethel was the place where Jacob had his first revelation, and it is not to say, "Go back and relive something." We can never relive something, and we should just let that out. You are never going to relive an experience, so do not torture yourself trying to get it back. There is no use in it, and God does not want that. He does not say, "I want you to live in this experience forever." No. "This is the start of an experience, and there are others as you go on and on. But I do not want you to relive an experience because it is not about the experience; it is Me; I want you to come to Me, the One whom I revealed to you as I AM. That is who I want you to come to. I do not want you to come to Me to experience the ladder and all this kind of stuff and try to redream a dream. I just want you to come to Me. I have already done that other thing, now come back to Me, and we will start from this point here. When you come back to Me we will go further once you get here."

So he goes back and he is renewed as far as his relationship with God. That is the key; the relationship is renewed. It is not the experience, but the relationship is renewed. His building of an altar for him was a new consecration. Jacob is already sanctified; God has already set him apart for His purposes. That is not the question. It is consecration that is the question. And his consecration went as far the first time as saying, "Well, if I go out and You bring me back with clothes, food, and everything, then You will be my God and I will give you ten percent." We snicker at Jacob, but God didn't. God said, "Okay, I will take you up on that, and I am going to bring you back here." And He did; He brought him back.

Then we have a new consecration. He raised up a pillar, but this time he made an altar. I think there is a big difference. A pillar is like a monument; an altar is for sacrifice. An altar is something that is committed, something of himself is committed.

Jacob Has a New Name

God also reminded him of who he was. As we look at this, starting in Genesis 35:9 it says, "Then God appeared to Jacob, and when he came from Paddi Aram, He blessed him and God said to him, 'Your name is Jacob; you shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.'" That is very interesting because at Peniel that was what he was renamed in chapter 32.

But from chapter 32 to 35 he was never called Israel except by himself when he made an altar to the God of Israel. But it was all just Jacob, Jacob, Jacob. So God reminded him that he was not Jacob. "I made you Israel. Israel shall be your name." Thus He called him Israel.

Genesis 35:11-12: "And God said to him, 'I am Almighty God. Be fruitful and multiply, and nations and companies of nations shall come from you. Kings shall come forth from you, and the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give it to you and will give you the land to your descendants after him.'"

So here we have Jacob renewing his relationship and God renewing His promise. "My promise has never changed, Jacob; you have. But that is okay. I want you to know that I call you Israel, and you are Mine. And the blessings I gave to Abraham and Isaac I give to you. You do not have to manipulate Me for them. I freely give them to you and you are for Me." So He reminded him of his standing before God and men because his family now will be known as Israel.

Jacob Meets the God of His Fathers

There is also a new thing that came out of this. God revealed something more than self to Jacob that He had never revealed before. The first time Jacob went to Bethel, when God introduced Himself, He said, "I am the God of your fathers," and He left it there. And to me that is so telling as to where Jacob was: "I thought He wanted me to have the birthright. I thought He wanted me to have the blessing. Can I have that without knowing the God of my fathers? He is the God of my fathers. I want the blessing of my fathers, but I do not know if I want the God of my fathers. But I want the blessing, I want the birthright, I want the position of those things"

So God now comes to him, and He begins by saying, "I am God Almighty. This is who I am. You have known Me only as the God of your fathers; I am going to let you know personally who I am. I am not just the God of your fathers; I am God Almighty. There is no one greater than Me, *no one greater than Me.*" And really this is the key to finishing the course of knowing who our God is. Paul knew, and he could pray for us because he was confident, but we have to be brought to that same place that we can say, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded."

Now just because this happened, Jacob could say, "Well, God Almighty did appear to me, it is God Almighty who has given me a new name and a new nature. It is God Almighty who has conferred His promises on me. But we still have to go on from that place. That is just a meeting place where we meet the Lord, and now we live out from that meeting. I do not want to say from that experience. We live it from that encounter with the Lord, where He has encountered us and brought us.

So what is Bethel for him? It is this encounter with God where he finds out who he is. "I found out that God has shown me He is God Almighty. He has spoken that word to me; He has told me personally." So Bethel is not some geographical place to stay in like 4424 because that is where I am. I am only at 4424 so you need to stay here. No, because in the rest of chapter 35 you find out that Jacob goes to Kiriath Arba, and he winds up at Mamre in Hebron. So he did not stay in Bethel. I thought God said, "Stay in Bethel and live in Bethel." No, He is not saying live in a geographical

place, but live in what I have shown you who I am. I want you to live out from that. I want you to live in the reality of that.

Then the course picks up from there. We want to spiritualize everything, but not everything can be spiritualized because life is life. Life happens. Things happen that we never expected. For instance, I went back to the school where Katie works, which is the school I used to work at, and I saw some of the teachers I used to work with, and they said, "Well, how is the retirement treating you?" Well, it hasn't turned out like I planned. Things happened. Things happened to change the course I wanted to go on. I wanted it nice and easy, but it did not happen that way. Shadows overcame me; things happened that I was not expecting. Things happened that I did expect, and I was prepared for it. Other things happened that I did not expect, and I was not prepared for it. So you have that tree that is growing this way and that way, but it is still reaching up.

God Proves Himself to Jacob

So you look at Jacob's life, at this revelation, this encounter with God where everything is tested because it has to be proved. And when I say it has to be proved, I mean that God wants to show us that this is true about Him. It is not that we are trying to prove God, although we do prove Him when we have faith, we prove that He is faithful. But He has proven to us that He is who He is. He is the Almighty God. He is the God who calls into being that which wasn't.

So what happens to Jacob is that his life continues. In chapter 35 Deborah, Rebecca's nurse died. And they go, "Oh big deal, she is an old lady, she is bound to die." But to Jacob Deborah was his last touch with his mother. He had never seen his mother again after he left to go to Uncle Laban's. He never saw her again, and so this nurse was precious to him. It was a reminder of his mom. When she smiled at him, it was his mom smiling at him. Now she died, and although he was expecting it to happen, but still does that mean it does not hurt? So his life must go on without that.

Then unexpectedly Rachel died in childbirth. Nobody expected that. She was just having a baby, and yet she died in childbirth, his most precious item. His love for Rachel made seven years seem like a few days because his love for Rachel was so great. And here he has this thing happen, and he still has to go on because life goes on. But he does have Benjamin to take her place. When he was reminded of Deborah, it was a reminder of Rebecca, and Benjamin was a reminder of Rachel, and he could take joy in that.

Then Isaac died, the one who had inherited everything from Abraham and then passed it on to Jacob. Of course, it was expected that he would die. But now for the first time he could say, "You know dad found what you found, and it is dead, passed away."

Then his kids are a mess. Levi and Simeon are thugs. Reuben, I do not want to say was a womanizer because that is not what he was, but he takes forbidden fruit; he was a sensual man. And Judah, what a deceiving man that was! A guy who would not give what is due his daughter-in-law, and then goes into a harlot and has a child. Then Dinah just wants to go and have fun. What a mess!

And to top that off, his sons sold Joseph off into slavery, and then lied to him. Here is a great family that comes from great stock, but the whole thing is that this is unforeseen. Now he is just broken hearted and thought his son was dead. And for the first time Jacob finds that he is really unable and insufficient to deal with the circumstances of life. He cannot manipulate Joseph back. He cannot do any of these things. He is for the first time finding he is unable to manipulate, insufficient to deal with the circumstances of life.

The Famine

And if this was not enough, at the end of Genesis chapter 42 of Genesis, there is a famine. How do you run out of food? Again, this is life. We want to say, "Well, God is orchestrating all these things" But God foresaw these things. We want to make it so that God is orchestrating everything. It is almost like it is fate. God lets life happen, and then He comes into the circumstances of life and works good. That is what Joseph said: "You meant it for evil, (that was you) but God turned it to good." God allows these things to happen for good. His plan is greater than yours.

So there is the famine, and he sends his kids down. Joseph recognizes them, and then he says, "I am keeping Simeon until you bring back your other brother." They go back with the food, and they find money in their sacks. And they told their dad that if they go back again, they would have to bring Benjamin. And Jacob blows a gasket. If this was not enough, and he comes up with this statement: "All of these things are against me."

Brothers and sisters, I think this is where I get defeated all the time. I look around, and it is not that I am looking at circumstances. I look at my life in general at the man I am in the flesh, and I say to that, "Oh, this is against me. How can I ever please God? How can I ever do that? I am so died in the wool sinful; I am so full of self. How can that ever be crucified in me? I cannot see it. All this is against me. Where is the God of Bethel?" And we find ourselves crying that.

Jacob Has to Give Up Benjamin

In chapter 43 we find another wrestling. Did you know that Jacob wrestled twice? He did, but this wrestling was not like the one at Peniel which lasted for a night. This lasted for a year. Between chapter 42 and 43 was the first going down in the famine. The next one it was always in the back of his mind, "I am going to have to give up Benjamin if I want more food. If this famine continues in this way, I am going to have to give him up, and I cannot bring myself to do it. After a year his sons finally came to him and said, "Dad, we need food. If we do not go and you do not send Benjamin, we are not going to get food, and we are all going to starve to death." And there goes the purpose of God. Of course, they did not say there goes the purpose of God, but there is a difference in this wrestling. At Peniel God conferred on him the name Israel, and in this wrestling the name Israel is confirmed. If you look at chapter 43, not once is the name Jacob used. It is all Israel. Something happened in this wrestling. It was not a revelation that he had. This wrestling overtime wore and eroded that self from within him, and it had to be that his concern was in keeping his family alive. In other words, it was his concern for others, and it became greater than his concern for himself, and because of that, he gave up Benjamin. And listen to his prayer in verse

11: "If it must be so that I have to give up Benjamin, then do this." In other words, he was submitting to the giving him up.

This is Jacob's Gethsemane; I do not want to say bold, but reverent. For him this was Gethsemane. "If I must do this, then let this go on." And if I am bereaved and I do not get Benjamin back, then I am bereaved." I do not think he said this weeping; I think he said this submissively. "If this is the way it is, Lord, then this is the way it is. I bow to it." So there is a resigning of his will to another. Israel is the one who lets go; he is not the grasper that Jacob is. And notice that he does not ask for deliverance, he does not ask for blessing. He says this in verse 14: "The Almighty God grant you mercy in the sight of the man." His prayer is for mercy. This is another change from Jacob to Israel. He did not say. "Oh Lord, bless me," or "Deliver me from this." His prayer is, "Let me know Your mercy in this." Now remember that mercy is undeserved. Nobody deserves mercy. Kindness is a giver, and he gives mercy. And here we have Jacob saying, "May God give you mercy."

And then he simply returns the money in the sack, saying, "Maybe it is an oversight." And you remember when he was trying to placate Essau he sent all these droves of animals ahead, one after the other, and he bowed seven times, "You do not have this." And he said, "Take this gift." And this gift was like a normal gift that you would give, like sometimes you go over to somebody's home to eat, and you bring a gift with you. Nothing elaborate or anything like that, but just showing that you appreciate. "Now we appreciate your suffering with us, and it just takes us back." So he does nothing beyond that by his own self trying to manipulate. And he commits everything to God Almighty. All of a sudden, and this is the key, it is not the seeing, but it is having seen we trust. And it is a big difference. We want to see, we want visions, we want higher knowledge, higher truth, and so we get them. But the question is, "Is the higher truth worked out in our life? Is the higher truth that we find out about the Lord made into trust? Because that is what the Lord is after. The Lord does not want you just to be knowledgeable. He has shown you who I am, now as you go out to the world, will you trust Me for whom I am? Will you trust Me that I have your good at heart? Will you trust Me that I know where you are, and I know what I am doing, and I have good things in store? Will you trust Me for that? That is what the Lord wants.

Jacob Ends By Worshipping

So how does Jacob end? In Hebrews chapter 11:21: "By faith Jacob, as he was dying blessed each of his sons, the sons of Joseph and worshipped leaning on top of his staff."

Now if you will notice in your Bible the word 'leaning' is in italics which means it is freely not there in translations. So why did they put it there? Let's read it without leaning. "And Jacob worshipped on top of his staff." That is really awkward. I would like to see somebody on top of a staff worshipping. It would probably be an act in a circus. So this made sense because what else do you do with a staff? You use it to lean on. Moses had a staff, shepherds have a staff. My father-in-law, who is 94 just started using a cane, and he does not use it right. It is an ornament, and he does not know how to use it because when you use a cane, it is to help you to balance. You have to put your weight on it to help you to balance. It has to be in step with you. If it is not in step with you, you are awkward. So the leaning is that I can put my weight on this, and I am not fearful that this is going to fall. I trust that this is strong enough to hold me. So to lean is to cast one's whole weight on the staff. Who was Jacob's staff? God Almighty. Jacob learned to lean on His staff.

And because he learned to lean on His staff, he could worship. Now he was not worried about himself anymore; he is leaning on One who is able to take the full weight of who He is and overcome it.

Mac talked about us as overcomers last week; God is the true Overcomer. God overcomes us in our life. It is not that we need to overcome circumstances. I think the first thing that has to be overcome is not by messages or circumstances, but by very God Himself; God showing us that He is greater than we are. I think that is the hardest lesson for any Christian to learn because we so often want to fix ourself like Jesus said, "Physician, fix yourself." And sometimes I think we feel when we get saved that is what the Lord says to us. "Now Physician heal yourself." He never says that. That is not His nature. His nature is to save. And here we have Jacob who has found for himself, "Oh God, I can lean on You. Even if I am bereaved I can lean on You. You are my staff." It is wonderful to know that He is able to do that.

And in closing I just want to say this: there was seven years of famine, and seven is the number of completion. I do not want to spiritualize it, but I want to take it beyond because you remember Peter asked, "How many times must I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Seven times plus?" Complete forgiveness. It is now at seventy times seven. What does that mean to us? God will complete it, and it does not matter how long it takes. I am not the completer.

Our brother shared about creation this morning, and the idea of creation is after seven days God rested, and then man fell, and then God began a new work, a work of redemption. And how long will that last? Until it is complete when the Lord comes back, and it will take as long as it takes to complete because God will do it. And that is why Paul has the confidence in God because he knows. He is saying, "I am not constricted by time; I do not have to worry about these Philippians. They only have so much time before this happens or that happens or they only have so much time that I am going to be with them.

Remember when he was with the elders in Ephesus (Acts 20)? What did he do? He said, "I commend you to God and His Word." Isn't that the place where we want to be commended to God? You know, that is what the Lord Jesus has done. When the Lord Jesus died, He said, "Into Your hands I commit My Spirit." Well now that He is risen from the dead and He is seated at the right hand of God, what has He done? What is He doing there at the right hand of God? He is commending us to the Father. "Father, work Your salvation, bring about the end of Your salvation." There is a song: "Finish then Thy new creation." That is what the Lord is praying right now. He is saying, "Father, finish Your new creation; bring it about in Your time." And He is confident in praying that, and He can say, "Amen, so be it." And brothers and sisters, that is for us. Are you wondering, "Am I going to make it through?" In God you are, in Christ you are. Be in Christ, remain in Christ, abide in Christ. Let Christ be Your salvation and rest. It is a wonderful thing to enter God's Sabbath rest, to know that He is the Creator. There is nothing I can do except to lean on my staff and worship Him who is able to do all because He is Almighty.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, we want to thank You that it is not that You do not give up on us; it is that You so value Your Son You will not give up anything He wants for You. Lord, we praise Your Son,

the Lord Jesus, who has given us to You, who has given us at great cost that has given us to You and we are Yours. Oh Lord, we put ourselves into Your hands. We pray, Lord that You would show us Yourself afresh. Recover us, renew us, Lord, where we have fallen, where we are at and bring us forward from there. Lord, we thank You that You are able to finish the work, You are able to perfect us until the day of Christ Jesus. So we commit ourselves into Your hands for that perfecting that You might be glorified because You are worthy of glory and honor and praise. And we give our thanks and our love to You who art our Almighty God, higher than any other. We worship You and we bow to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.