

Genesis Chapter 45

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 01] We read from Genesis 47 a few minutes ago, but I just would like you to turn for a moment to Matthew 2, Matthew chapter 2, and verses 13 to 15.

Matthew 2, verses 13 to 15, part of the nativity story that we know very well, the birth of Christ, the visit of the magi, the wise men, and we're told that when they had gone, verse 13, that's the wise men, An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. Get up, he said, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. None of us can be unaware of the events that are taking place in several areas of Europe, as many hundreds of thousands of people are fleeing from North Africa, Middle East, and especially from civil war in Syria.

The countries of the European Union are in ongoing discussions as they attempt to find a solution to this mass migration. Thousands every day risk danger and death, but it seems that confusion and inactivity hold sway in many governments.

It's certain, for one thing, that in the West, in Europe, every country will receive tens of thousands or more refugees in the coming months and years ahead, including the UK. So we shall all be affected in one way or another.

[1 : 51] Contrary to what would appear to be the case portrayed to us, this is not a new thing. Refugees and migrants and asylum seekers in huge numbers have fled from their home countries in the past, and many of them have found repeatedly a warm welcome and refuge in the UK.

150 years ago or so, the Irish potato famine, which blighted that country, drove hundreds of thousands of people across the sea to Liverpool and beyond throughout England and the UK. In fact, 25% of all people in England have some Irish ancestry. 10% of at least one Irish grandparent. I'm one of those 10%, but I...

300 years ago, 50,000 French Huguenots, that's Protestant Christians, had to flee persecution from France to England. In the last century, the 20th century in the UK, we received tens of thousands of Belgians and Armenians because of the First World War, at least 40,000 Jews fleeing Nazi Germany and Austria in the 1930s, and 50,000 Ugandan Asians driven out by Idi Amin in his tyrannical reign in the mid-70s.

So, it's nothing new, is it? And many of you have lived through many of those events, not the Huguenots I mentioned to ask. But of course, more relevant to us as Christians is not what history teaches us, but what does the Bible teach us?

[3 : 26] What does the Bible have to say about refugees, asylum seekers? It's put upon my heart, just early this week when preparing for this Sunday, I thought that I would go back to the series that we left off before I was away on holiday, the I Am Sayings of Jesus, but it seemed to me that there's an issue that we need to look at what God's Word has to say to us.

We're bombarded by all sorts of facts, statistics, information, pictures. But what does the Bible teach? What does the Bible say? Well, it has a lot to say about asylum seekers and refugees. In fact, there are lots and lots of asylum seekers and refugees mentioned in the Bible and how they are treated and how they are dealt with. So this present problem is not something that we should be unwilling to learn about or put our heads in the sand, but rather, as we look to God's Word, we see how we are to face and to deal with these challenges of living in a broken world.

Not just in the present crisis, but in others that have gone and others that will most certainly come. There's three things that I want us just to look at to begin with.

There's three ways that we must view and should look at those who are migrants and refugees. The first thing is this, we must view them as valuable people.

[4 : 50] We must view them as valuable people. See, the people traffickers see them as a commodity. They see them as a way to get rich quick. Many in government, in the UK and other places, the media consider them just a problem, a nuisance, a swarm.

But we must view them as God views them. We must see these people as God sees them. And for that reason, that's why I read from Matthew 2, because we realize and should understand that the Lord Jesus Christ himself was an asylum seeker for a while in Egypt.

He himself was a refugee driven from his home, along with his parents, to seek asylum in Egypt, because there were threats against his life and he would certainly have faced execution and death, should he have stayed where he was.

Today, amongst all those asylum seekers that we hear about and refugees, there are many who are brothers and sisters in Christ. There are many who are believers. Most of those living in Syria are Christians, or many of them are.

In fact, one third of all the Christians who were in Syria before the war have left, have fled for their lives to one country or another. But you see, every human life is precious in God's sight.

[6 : 06] Every human life is valuable. And we must be very careful that as we see what's going on and we hear what's going on through the media, that we don't start to value a person's life according to the standards of the world.

That we don't value a human life according to race or religion or age or education or possessions. We value them as those who've been created in the image of God, who are precious in his sights. Therefore, at the very least we must have his pity for them, and the best we must have and should all seek after is to have love for them, as Christ had love over the many thousands that sought him, and whom he saw as sheep without a shepherd.

He had compassion over them. The world sees them either as a nuisance, sees them as a pain, sees them as an awkward problem, but about us as Christians?

Do we see that they are people? People who have real lives, who've had to leave homes, families, loved ones, who've suffered in tremendous ways, that we hopefully shall never have to suffer.

[7 : 18] Do we love them? Does our heart go out to them? Surely that's the very first thing that we should have. We should see them as valuable people. The second thing is a negative in one sense.

We are not to view them with fear. We're not to see asylum seekers and refugees as people to be afraid of and fearful of. That's one of the reasons I read from Genesis 47.

As I said, the Bible has a lot to say about refugees and asylum seekers. Jacob and his family were just that, fleeing famine in their land in Canaan.

Then they went to Egypt, where Joseph was already seeking asylum. That's why they said to the Pharaoh, we have come to live here a while, because the famine is severe in Canaan.

Now, you know the story. After just a few years' time, after first of all being welcomed and received, the attitude of Egypt and the king in particular changed. Exodus in chapter 1 and verse 8, a new king who did not know about Joseph.

[8 : 24] Joseph had been God's man to preserve Egypt and to preserve the food in the midst of the famine. A new king who didn't know about Joseph came to power in Egypt.

Look, he said to his people, the Israelites have become too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them, or they will become even more numerous, and if war breaks out, they'll join our enemies, fight against us, and leave the country.

What is driving him is fear. He's driven by fear, and fear drove him to carry out atrocious acts of murdering children, of oppressing and enslaving a people, so that for 400 years, the people of God, the Hebrews, were dealt with in terrible way.

Fear did that. Fear over these asylum seekers. Again, dear friends, sadly, in the world around about us and in the media, there is that sense of stirring up fear in the UK about many or some of the asylum seekers being terrorists, sheep in wool clothing, militant Islamists sneaking into Europe so they can undermine, attack, destroy.

Well, there's speculation, and that is all it is. It creates an atmosphere of fear. The fact is that those terrorist attacks that we have known and suffered here in the UK over the years have been carried out by homegrown radicals.

[9 : 54] Young people, mainly young men, mainly who've grown up, been born in Britain, influenced by extremist teaching, not by people coming in. But even if there are, and maybe there may be, some radicals or militantly minded people amongst those hundreds of thousands, should we reject all of them for the sake of a few?

Should we put up walls and barriers against them because a few of them might be that way? Should we be governed by fear or ruled by love? Should we be those who are ruled by hate or by God's mercy?

That's not how to live, is it? We don't live as Christians under fear. We don't act and respond to situations with fear. We act and live with love for God. Love for those people.

Fear is a terribly powerful force, but it always creates bondage. It always creates sorrow. It always creates destruction, as we saw with the Hebrews who went to Egypt.

As Christians, we're not people of fear, but people of faith and people of love. And thirdly, we're not only to view each one of these people as precious, valuable, we are not to view them with fear, but we're also to view them as potential Christians.

[11 : 19] Potential Christians. Just as we view everybody. Just as we view everybody around about us in WIPPY and everybody around about us in the world, those who haven't got faith in Christ, we view them as those who potentially God may save and rescue and bring to faith in Christ.

We view them as those who God may wonderfully bring into life everlasting. You need to remember that everything that goes on in the world around about us that has ever gone on in the world around about us has been part of God's gracious plan to save sinners, to build his church, to rescue the lost.

Everything that's gone on from the moment of creation all the way through the building up to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world and ever since his coming into the world, God has been carrying out this wonderful plan of salvation, of redemption so that even through the things that happen around about us, God has been working in individual lives, in nations so that people may be saved.

There's one young man in the Bible who was a refugee. He ran away from his home to find a better life for himself. His name was Onesimus.

You can read about him in the letter that Paul writes. It's a very personal letter to a man called Philemon. It's just one page after Titus and before Hebrews. Onesimus travelled hundreds of miles running away from his homeland to get to Rome where he hoped to get into the sanctuary of the great crowds that were milling there or make his life.

[12 : 56] But there for some reason or another in God's wonderful providence he came across the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul spoke to him of the gospel something he had never heard before and he was wonderfully converted.

Here's how Paul describes it. He says, I appeal to you for my son Onesimus who became my son while I was in chains. When he speaks about that he speaks about him being a son in the faith coming to faith in Christ.

While Paul was in prison he meets with Onesimus this asylum seeker this refugee and he shares the gospel with him and he is saved. Paul sends him back to his old home now as a Christian now as somebody useful as an ambassador for Christ.

He says there later on in verse 15 of the letter perhaps the reason he was separated from you a little while was that you might have him back for good no longer as a slave but better than a slave a dear brother.

Onesimus goes back now he takes the gospel with him which he had received when he was a refugee. There's several churches in the UK and around Europe that are working and several missionaries and organizations working to share the gospel with those who come from countries where they could not and never did hear the gospel mainly Islamic countries.

[14 : 18] We know of Adrian and Tonya Brixey who were part of the fellowship here working in Gloucester last weekend we had Kamal and Emma working in Manchester doing the same thing taking the gospel to people who've come into the country from places where they cannot hear the gospel not just from Syria but Iran, Afghanistan many other places where it's forbidden forbidden for them to even trust in Christ and live a Christian life or to hear about it.

But now what's happening? Is it God who's bringing tens of thousands of people out of those lands where they were enslaved and where they were in fear? Is it God who's bringing them into other

countries in Europe where they are free now to hear the gospel free to come to faith in Christ and to believe upon him?

Is it possible that God could be doing that so that in one day he may send them back to their own land carrying the gospel which they were forbidden to receive? Certainly it's happened many times before why shouldn't it happen again?

Shouldn't our faith rise to meet the challenge of what we see happening around about us? And so I just want to bring five points now five points of action if I can put it that way in light of God's word we've seen that God's word has taught us and we see that people are valuable even if others treat them poorly as Christians we are to value every soul every life as precious we're not to face them with fear because we are afraid of what they might do or what they might say or how they might appear we're not to be fearful people might argue well of course we haven't got enough houses and we haven't got enough land and we haven't got enough money and we haven't got that's never stopped nations before it's never stopped the UK before even as I say in times of great great suffering and hardship God will always provide as we step out in faith and we are dear friends to look upon these dear people as people who need the gospel and who God by his grace may well save so how should that change us how should that affect us what are we to do when we realise that this is the case first of all

I believe dear friends the first thing we must do is we must be grateful the five B's be grateful that we live in safety and we have a home of our own be grateful that we was teaching the children this morning grateful that we have a home we aren't sleeping on the streets of an island in the Mediterranean we aren't having to go across on a rubber boat from Libya we aren't having to risk our lives we have safety and security in a home here in this country but more than that dear friends we have freedom we have freedom we may moan about the government and complain about what's going on in the world around about us but we still have great freedom to speak for the Lord Jesus Christ to live out a Christian life for him freedom from persecution and death we need to be grateful to God for that and not take it for granted perhaps there may come a time when we have to flee from the UK because of persecution against Christians it's happened before pilgrim fathers who went across to found the United

[17:40] States of America fleeing religious persecution because they wanted to follow the Bible be grateful let's give thanks to God for that let's be informed be informed all that we hear and receive in the media the news the papers let's just not accept it all as being verbatim truth not trying to sell some political message hear it all in a way but let's search out Christian resources let's read from Christian periodicals and newspapers charities like Tear Fund Barnabas Fund who are working with and helping on the floor who are coming from God's perspective not the world's perspective let's be informed about these things let's not just speak from ignorance because oh well I heard somebody say this because we're better informed let's be prayerful let's be prayerful if we know and understand what's going on that we can pray better and we should be praying for these dear people pray for those who are Christians who are refugees pray that they might be protected from harm pray that they might be kept and brought into a place of safety pray for those who are working with them the charities churches individuals who are actively helping these needy people pray for them

God is the God who answers prayer we believe that so let's pray with understanding thirdly let's be generous we have so much where can we give help it may be just a little bit financially towards one of those charities or one of those organizations that are helping it may be in other ways that we can practically help in some way or another we'll be having to clear out of the wardrobe to send clothes or blankets or whatever it may be let's find out let's not just shake our heads or even sort of wring our hands as it were and say what an awful situation it is let's act we have so much to give they have so very little let's be generous surely again we learn that from the scriptures finally dear friends not only be grateful and be informed and be prayerful and be generous but be expectant be expectant that God is working in and through this situation be expectant that God will save people that he will build his church that he will move in such a way to make and fulfill his promises and plans what is God's ultimate promise what is his ultimate plan it's that this that all the ends of the earth should hear the gospel of

Jesus Christ that men and women should be saved and brought in let's expect that God should be doing that now let's be expecting that God shall fulfill his promises let's be full of faith because we recognize that our world is not in the hands of bureaucrats and politicians our lives and our world is

in the hand of almighty God who does all things as he fits that's how faith to trust in him that he shall indeed bring about good things out of bad that's that's what our God is like he brings good out of bad he brings out of Joseph being incarcerated in prison he brings life and freedom and supply for a whole nation and many beyond he brings out of of course the greatest tragedy in all of human history the death of the Lord Jesus Christ the only sinless perfect person he brings out of his death forgiveness and eternal life for all those who will believe upon him our God is a God who turns around the impossible situations he's a God who does the unexpected he's a God who transforms he's a God who builds and saves as Christians dear friends as those who are living in today this year 2015 who are living in Europe who are living in the UK who are seeing these things going on God has something to say he says to those of us who are not Christians be saved you have no excuse for not trusting in Christ you live in a land where there's freedom to hear the gospel you live in a land where there's freedom to put your faith in him you've got no excuse those many thousands of refugees never heard of Christ God will deal with them and judge them accordingly but how is he going to judge you and deal with you who've heard and rejected and lived without taking the opportunity that he's given for those of us who are believers let's not be ruled by fear but by faith let's look upon this vast harvest field which is what it is that God is bringing into the sphere of the gospel in Europe and let's thank him and let's roll up our sleeves and accept the challenge he's given us let us not be put off let us not be governed by that which is wrong racism sectarianism those things that have haunted and plagued humanity for so long let us as Christians be different so that we might show forth the reality of God and the gospel in our lives and let's be faithful to do all that he's given us to do and with faith look to him to take and use us at this time let's pray together let's respond to God's word in prayer together now shall we father we're so thankful that in the midst of confusion you bring light in the midst of darkness you bring truth and we thank you for your word we thank you that the bible is the most up to date relevant book in the whole world it speaks into humanity's situation every time and with clarity and understanding thank you that you are not a god of confusion or disorder you know what you're doing and you know what we should do and we thank you for making your will known to us in your word not only that we might trust christ and follow him and love him and serve him but we might know what to do when we're faced with really big challenges as we see around about us we do praise you and thank you again for those who are working so hard and who are giving sacrificially to care for and to watch over and to protect those who are fleeing from persecution and from war and from great sorrow and hardship we again pray oh lord that you would fill our hearts with love and compassion as your heart surely is and that you would move us to action in prayer in giving in welcome in whatever way lord it's possible for you to work in us and through us we do pray again oh lord that you would be pleased to save those many many thousands who are coming in who as they come into touch with your churches and with your people may they hear the gospel and receive it and may oh lord you give us that faith to rest to trust in you and not only for this matter but for those other crises that we face in our own lives crises financially crises of health crises and worries for the future help us again lord to lay all our hope and faith in you our refuge our strength our ever present help in time of trouble amen may the god of peace who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our lord jesus that great shepherd of the sheep may he equip you with everything good for doing his will may he work in us what is pleasing to him through jesus christ to whom be glory forever and ever amen